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Selwyns
in
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Wilhelmina

THE SELWYNS IN DIXIE

by

CLEMENTIA *pseud.*

*Author of Mostly Mary, Mary's Rainbow, Uncle Frank's Mary,
The Quest of Mary Selwyn, Bird-a-Lea, etc.*

Felshaw, Sister Mary Edward



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THE SELWYNS IN DIXIE

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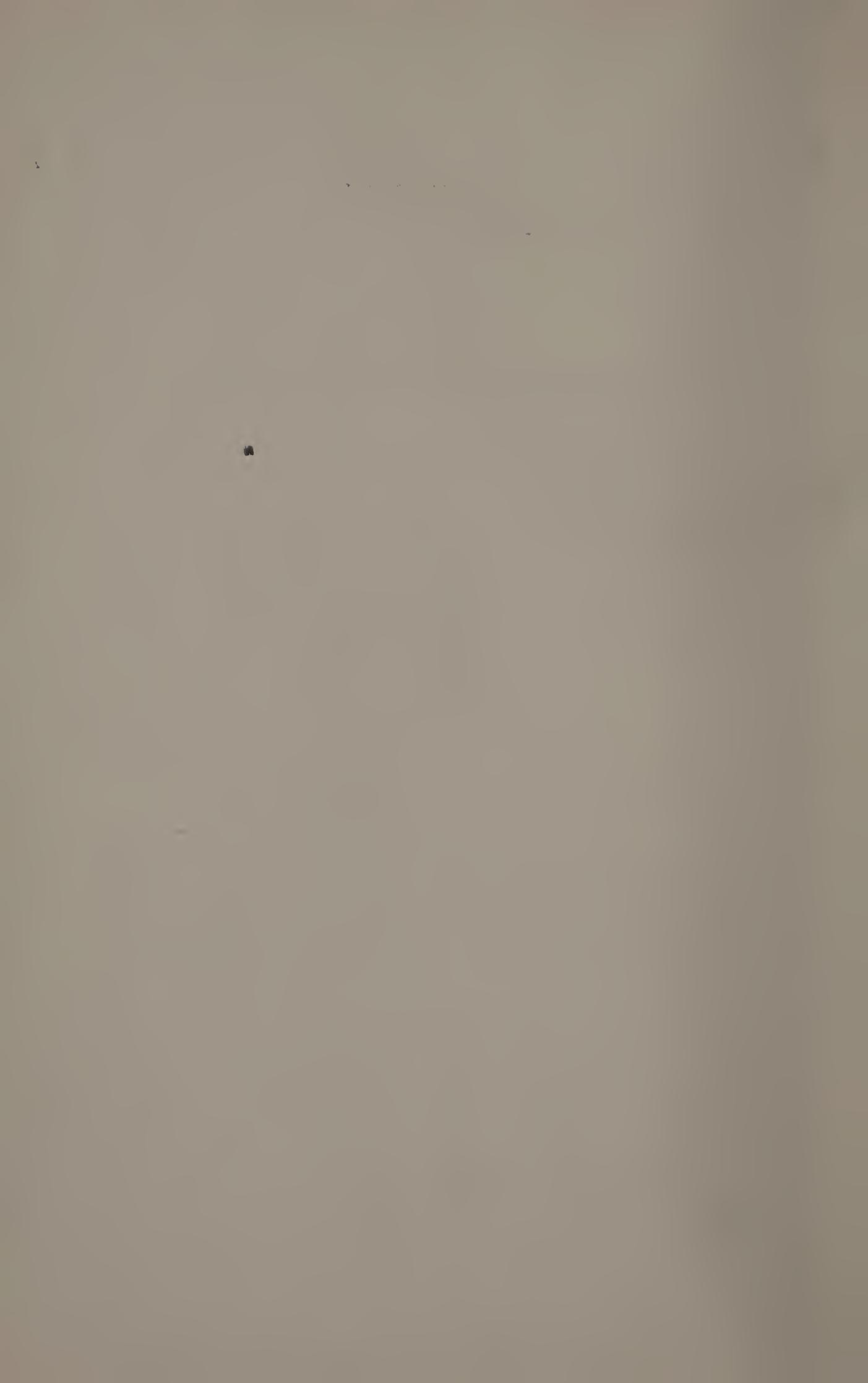
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To the dear
ALUMNÆ
OF
S. P. A.

*this little story
is gratefully inscribed.*



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THE SELWYNS IN DIXIE

CHAPTER I

A STOLEN VISIT

The gaunt, black branches of the great trees swayed and creaked uneasily in the cold, raw, east wind, which moaned about the corners of the house, rattling the icicles still clinging to the dead vines on the walls. To Jerry, trudging along the road from the village, Bird-a-Lea presented a dismal, deserted appearance, indeed.

"Who'd ever think the place could look so spooky." And muttering to himself, he vaulted over the low stone wall with the intention of taking a short cut through the orchard and gardens to the barns. "Mebbe I ain't glad it's the middle of Janiwerry 'stead of November. The winter can't last more'n two months longer, and they'll be back just as soon as the spring sets in. It'll be a mighty lonesome time, I'm thinkin', 'thout the two little ones runnin' out every day with all their old chat to see how's the flowers doin'; and Miss Mary, Lord love her, comin' every mornin' first thing for some posies for her little altar. She's a plucky youngster, 'n so's the one that went with her that night to rout out the nuns and tell 'em the convent was afire. I'll be hanged if I know how I'm goin' to stand it after the lively times we've been havin'

with all them black-eyed kids from Georgia about the place for the past two or three weeks. Fine, manly little chaps, every one of 'em. I'll never forget how cunnin' that littlest one, Jack, looked, comin' out of the greenhouse yesterday mornin' with his hands in his pockets and his cap on the back of his head and my old pipe in his mouth. What in tarnation—!" He stopped abruptly and stared at the front porch. "'Tain't one of the dogs, because I locked 'em all up in the barn before I started for the village."

The gardener cautiously approached the house, keeping the trunks of the trees between him and the moving object. In the rapidly deepening twilight he found it impossible to discern what it was; and when he had reached the edge of the orchard, he stood for some minutes behind a tree waiting for it to turn and approach the east end of the porch. In this, however, he was disappointed; for when the dark object, in a strangely hesitating manner, reached the far end, it disappeared around the west side of the house.

"It's going to follow the porch all the way round, an' I'll take the chance of gettin' a closer look at the critter." He strode across the intervening lawn to a great maple growing near the south-east corner of the house; but he might have adopted a more leisurely gait, for he had ample time to lose his patience before the object of his curiosity again made its appearance.

"Well, I'll be hanged if it ain't a child! One of the little girls from the convent, it must be; there ain't any others hereabouts. But what's she up to, anyhow? Oho! so that's your game, is it? Tryin' every last window and door to see if they're open. No use. I went around after the folks left and fastened 'em well so's I could go off to the village with a mind easy on that score."

On came the child, utterly unconscious of Jerry's watchful eye. Save for a small shawl which she clutched tightly about her head and shoulders, she wore no wraps.

"If it wasn't that I'd scare the wits out of her, I'd wrap my overcoat around her and hustle her back where she belongs, the little mischief! She'll get her death! Listen to her cough! Scare or no scare, if she ain't satisfied pretty soon, I'll take a hand." Jerry himself shivered in the piercing wind.

Turning the corner of the house, the child proceeded from window to window until she reached the front door. Seizing the knob with both hands, she turned and twisted and shook it with all her small strength; then, with a cry of bitter disappointment, she sank sobbing and coughing against the door. This was too much for Jerry; and throwing caution to the wind, he strode along the driveway toward the front steps. At the sound of his footsteps, the child started up with a frightened scream and fled to the west end of the porch.

"Don't be scared, little girl. It's only me."

"O Jerry, how you frightened me!" With a sob of relief she retraced her steps. "It's getting so dark that I couldn't see who you were."

"But what in creation are you doin' over here at this time of the day, Miss —— Miss —— you mustn't mind that I've forgot your name. I know you all right; but Miss Mary has so many of her friends from the convent over here, that it would take a Philadelphia lawyer to remember all their names. Don't you know the whole family's gone away for the rest of the winter, and there ain't no one in the house or about the place except me?"

"Yes, yes, I know they have gone, and she will never, never come back." The sobbing began again. "She never stopped being kind to me, and I love her more than I do anyone else in this whole world; but everybody that I have ever loved has gone away and has never come back,—Father, Mother, Grandmother,—and now she's gone, too, and I know she will never——"

"Oh, come, come, don't cry like that. See here," Jerry produced a bunch of keys, "you've got to come inside and get warm. I can turn on one of them new-fangled heaters if the steam's gone down. I was lettin' the fire die out, knowin' there wouldn't be no more use for it. What were the nuns thinkin' of to let you out like this?"

"They don't know I am here, Jerry, and you

must never tell.’’ The child spoke in a whisper as, with a new light in her eyes, she followed him into the library. ‘‘I’m Florence— Florence Berkeley. Of course, I shall tell Mother Madeline the very first time I see her. She is Mary’s aunt, you know, and she will understand; but no one else would.’’

‘‘But what about that cold you’ve got?’’

‘‘Oh, that!’’ She sighed wearily. ‘‘Yes, it almost shakes me to pieces when I cough. I have been in the infirmary for a week; but I was better to-day, and there was no one else sick, so Sister went to the chapel to prayers with the other nuns. I just couldn’t stand it another minute; so I took her little shawl and went down the infirmary stairs and out the side door.’’

‘‘And what did you want over here when you knew they’d all gone?’’ Jerry was plainly bewildered.

‘‘What did I want over here! If the one you loved best in the whole world had gone away and was never, never coming back,’’—the big gray eyes once more overflowed, and the tears ran unheeded down the thin little face,—‘‘and if you were lonely enough to die, wouldn’t it be a little comfort to you to see the things that she had seen and used every day? I knew you were going to be here to take care of the place, so I didn’t think that the house was all locked up, and I went all the way around the porch and tried every window and door—but what is the use, anyway! She’s

gone, she's gone, and she will never, *never* come back!" And the child bowed her head on the arm of the big chair in which she was seated, sobbing in a fashion most distressing to Jerry.

"Which one of 'em is it you're talkin' about? and why ain't she comin' back?" he hazarded gently.

"Why, Mary,—of course. She—and Wilhelmina came up—to say g—good-by, and she l—looked—s—so weak and pale—and—oh, I know very w—well they have t—taken her away b—because she is—go—going to *die!*"

"Die, nothin'! If they'd thought that, they'd have stayed at home and let her die in peace. Travelin' is too hard on sick folks to have 'em takin' a long trip for nothin'. Of course she's weak after bein' laid up for a month; and pale—well, when she's with Miss Wilhelmina, she always does look like a lily o' the valley alongside a chrysanthemum show. It's the same with the two little ones. If my opinion was asked, I'd say it's Miss Beth that's goin' to die young. Miss Mary was lively as a cricket when they were leavin', though she did seem to hate to go in a way. It was that big, long fur cape of her mother's that made her look so kind of lost like. She couldn't wear her own coat on account of her arm, you know. Only for breakin' that, she would have got well as fast as Miss Wilhelmina did. They both took their death o' cold the night of the fire.

But take my word for it, they'll all be back here just as soon as the real spring weather sets in; and the signs are for an early spring, too. Now, I'm goin' to hunt up a coat or shawl or somethin' to wrap you up in before you start back to the convent; and when you get there, you'd better go straight to bed and stay till you get rid of that cough, or we'll like as not be havin' a fun'r'al nearer home."

"And while you are looking for something, will you let me go up to her room for just a minute, Jerry? It would be such a comfort, you know."

The gardener could not resist the wistful appeal. "Sure you can go up; but I'll go along to switch on the lights. Then I'll come down and hunt up that coat I saw hangin' somewhere down here. Like as not it's in the little room where they keep their rubbers and everyday things."

Left to herself, Florence moved about Mary's room, giving loving little pats to the various pieces of furniture. The small articles from dresser, desk, and table had been put away; but the pictures on the walls had not been disturbed. Before a group of kodak pictures, she stood for some moments: then, pushing a chair beneath it, she climbed up and passionately kissed every picture in which Mary appeared.

"Oh, if I could have just one of them," she murmured. "Dear God, don't let anything happen to her—anyway, not until I have a chance to

do something for her.’’ And descending from the chair, she turned to the little oratory and gazed thoughtfully at the statue of Our Lady of Lourdes enshrined there. ‘‘If I could love you as Mary does and feel that you love me the way you must care for her since you have done such wonderful things for her! But I never heard of you until I came to Maryvale, and perhaps you don’t love anyone but Catholics. But He does, so I should think you would, too. If I could feel that you are my Mother as Mary does, even though she has her mother on earth, I would never be lonely. I can’t remember my mother, and Grandmother didn’t understand very well. She was always good to me, but I couldn’t talk to her as I could to you if I thought you loved me. I wonder just how you do feel toward people like me. I know! I shall ask Mother Madeline.’’

Turning off the light, she crossed the hall and descended the stairs to the library, where Jerry was waiting with the coat.

‘‘There ain’t no hurry about bringin’ it back, miss.’’

‘‘Why, that’s Wilhelmina’s every-day coat. It will make things ever so much easier for me. I can hang this in the dressing-room, and Sister will find it and send it up to the wardrobe to be put away with her other clothes. But if she were to find anything of Mary’s, she would be surprised and ask questions, because Mary hasn’t been a

boarder this year, you know.”

“I see; and while I don’t want to hurry you off, I take it that you’d like to be back in the infirmary before the Sister gets there. It’s a quarter to six now, so you’ll just about make it. I’ve noticed that the lights in the chapel go out after the *Angelus* rings.”

Florence donned the coat with alacrity, tied the little shawl about her head, and extended her hand to Jerry. “I can’t thank you enough for being so kind to me, and I’m sorry that I put you to so much trouble. Good-night, Jerry.”

“No trouble, at all, miss; but I won’t say good-night till I see you safe and sound inside the door over there. This Janiwerry thaw’s made the walkin’ pretty bad, and the wind’s strong enough to blow you away.”

“Oh, but Jerry,—” the little girl hesitated, fearing to hurt the gardener’s feelings. “While I would be glad to have you come, because everything is so bare and lonesome-looking, I’m afraid someone will see us. I’m not very big, and I think I could slip in better alone. Don’t you think so?”

“We’ll manage that part all right. I’ll take you across the grounds here and through the orchard over there; but I’ll keep a safe distance from the buildin’.”

“Then everything will be all right. No one is in the east wing now except in the chapel. The auditorium is below it, and the gymnasium in the

basement. The door I want is near the back of the west wing; so we shall have to go around behind the convent."

"I've a good mind to pick you up and carry you. You're downright weak in the knees and shakin' with chills." Jerry grasped her arm more firmly as she slipped and stumbled over the half-frozen ground. "Well, suit yourself," he continued as Florence protested; "but you've got to promise to go to bed the minute you've had your supper."

"Yes, Jerry, I promise you that; and please promise me that you will never, never tell about this evening."

"Don't let that worry you. I believe in lettin' folks tell their own stories in their own way. Of course, I couldn't make such a promise if you hadn't said you'll tell the Mother over here. You're a sick child; and I'd feel mighty guilty if I didn't let someone know about the risk you've run."

"I didn't think of it as a risk," meekly responded Florence. "I couldn't think of anything but Mary. You don't know how glad I am that I talked to you about her, Jerry. I feel now that maybe she will come back—"

"Sure she will! She'll come back stronger and heartier than you'll be if you try any more such doin's as you've been up to this evening."

Florence gave a weak little laugh. "I think I had better say good-night to you here, Jerry. You

see, this space between the wings is quite bright from the light shining through the windows."

"All right, if you're sure you can get across to the other side without fallin'. And mum's the word," he sent after her in a loud whisper, adding under his breath as he stood watching until she had disappeared within the doorway, "But that don't keep me from seein' the good Mother and tellin' her she might do worse than call as soon as ever she can at the infirm'ry, where she'll hear somethin' to somebody's advantage."

CHAPTER II

SOUTHWARD BOUND

At the same hour, Mary, snugly settled on the lounge in the drawing-room of the sleeper, opened her eyes after a long, long nap. For some minutes she lay watching the telegraph poles flit by in the rapidly deepening twilight. Then her attention was attracted by the murmur of voices which occasionally rose above the rumble and roar of the train. She wondered what they were talking about—her father, mother, and little sisters, who, with Mrs. Marvin, Wilhelmina, and all the little Marvins occupied so many sections beyond the door of the drawing-room that her uncle had laughingly proposed chartering the whole sleeper. Phil and Harry Marvin had been obliged to return to school the Monday after New Year's Day; and Joe, who, since his thirteenth birthday, had secretly chafed at the idea of being any longer taught by the family governess, had, to his great satisfaction, been allowed to accompany them. After an immense amount of coaxing, the two eldest boys had won their father's reluctant consent to their leaving the Catholic college which they had been attending, for a nonsectarian school in Virginia, highly recommended by some of their Georgia neighbors. Mr. Marvin had accompanied his sons to the new school, intending to rejoin the party at Richmond.

Mary smiled contentedly as she thought over the events of the past two weeks—such happy, happy weeks in spite of her inability to take part in the sleighing and skating parties and the numerous other jollifications by which the guests from the South had been entertained at Bird-a-Lea. Then had come the bustle and excitement of packing for the visit to Sunnymead, as the Marvin plantation was called; and to Cedar Ridge, Mr. Selwyn's old home in Virginia. It was not without a pang, however, that the little girl bade farewell to beautiful Bird-a-Lea, where she had spent the four happiest months of her life; and it was a matter of far deeper regret that her uncle could not accompany the family.

"Of course, Wilhelmina," she had explained to her little friend the night before their departure, "Aunt Mary will miss us, too; but she has all the Sisters at Maryvale to keep her company. With Uncle Frank it is different. He will live in the apartments at his office, you know, and Liza will keep house for him and take good care of him as she did all that time when Father and Mother were away. Still, I know just how lonely it will be for him every evening when he sits down to dinner all by himself without Father to talk over the questions of the day with him, and Mother or me to pour his tea." And Mary's eyes filled as the doleful picture rose before her.

"If I were you, Mary, I would just *make* him come with us."

"But how *can* I make him?"

"Hm! I would soon find a way. Just before the train pulls out to-morrow afternoon, jerk all those bandages off your arm, and then he will have to stay to fix it up again, and we'll have him."

"Yes, for a little while. But even if he were to stay on the train until we reach Philadelphia, he would get off there and come back to New York to-morrow night. No, I think the very best way will be to beg and beg him at the last minute to-morrow afternoon. He can wire to Liza to pack his trunk and send it after him."

And this was what the little girl had done that afternoon when Doctor Carlton, after seeing that each member of the very large party was comfortably settled in the sleeper, had returned to the drawing-room for a last word with his Mary.

"Uncle, dear, why, why, *why* can't you come now instead of waiting for six whole weeks or more? And you say you won't be able to stay but a few days even then. There are hundreds of doctors in New York, ever so many of them so poor that they would be only too anxious to earn a little money by taking care of your patients for you. Indeed, I should think you would be glad to do an act of charity by putting a little practice in their way."

"So I would; especially when so tempting a reward is held out to me. But what about my patients? are they to have no voice in the matter?

After calling me in to attend them, they would surely have a right to object were I to turn them over to someone not of their own choosing. How would you have felt if, after your accident, I had gone off on a pleasure trip and left you to the care of a stranger, eh?"

"But you are sending *me* hundreds of miles away though I am not well yet. Neither are Father and Mother and Beth. I think I shall do as Wilhelmina said—pull all these bandages off my arm; but I shall wait until I get down there instead of doing it here. Then you will *have* to come down to fix me up again. I suppose my arm will pain dreadfully; but that will be easier to bear than to be thinking of you all alone every single evening with no one to play the things you like best, and no one to make you take care of yourself—for you know right well, sir, you are always taking care of everyone else, and never think about yourself at all—and—and—Uncle, you *know* you will be just as lonely without us as we shall be without you!"

"Indeed, I know that only too well." A pathetic smile flitted across the Doctor's face. "And were I to consult my own inclinations, I should never allow you to leave Bird-a-Lea. When a man of my disposition, after some years of lonely bachelorhood, finds himself again enjoying the peace and contentment of family life, I assure you, dearie, that it is no joke for him to be obliged to return

to his former mode of existence. However, as there is no other way out of the difficulty, you and I must make the best of it. I fear that we have already delayed too long. I should have packed you all off the first of December, but simply could not screw up courage enough to do so."

"The first of December! Why, Uncle! think how terrible it would have been if no one had been at Bird-a-Lea the night of the fire! The east wing, perhaps the whole convent, would have burned to the ground!"

"Very true. I did not look at the matter in that light, but have been reproaching myself for having brought so much suffering upon you through my selfishness—"

"Selfishness! You call it selfishness to arrange things so we could all have a most beautiful Christmas together? Indeed, Uncle, I think *I* am the one to blame for all the trouble and everything. I never manage things right; but all I could think of that night was to ring the big bell so that Father Hartley would come in time to take the Blessed Sacrament from the Chapel to some safe place, and so that the men from the village would come to help put out the fire."

"I think you managed wonderfully well on that occasion. However faulty in your own opinion your methods may be, you always 'gits dah jes' de same,' as Tom would say; and since you yourself are invariably the one to suffer the ill effects of

your stupidity, as you are pleased to call it, who, pray, has any right to complain? But what was that threat you made about your arm a while ago? Let me hear of your attempting to remove one of those bandages, young lady! I have written to Doctor Blackwell, the Marvins' old family physician, who will keep an eye on you until you leave for Cedar Ridge; so waste no time or money on telegrams to me, my dear. But all joking aside, do be careful of that poor arm for a little while longer. It is doing so well that I have every reason to hope that you will suffer no permanent inconvenience from your accident. It would, indeed, be a pity if, through carelessness, you were to disable it for life. What would I ever do without my little musician?"'

Mary laughed. "I should have to play all left-handed pieces. But really, Uncle, I shall be as careful of it as if it were made of egg-shells."

"And take your tonic faithfully and live outdoors as much as possible. I hope to find a little color in those pale cheeks when I see you again."

"I shall scrub them every morning and night with my nail-brush and pinch them well before and after meals so that when you come down you will say to Father, 'Who in the world is that rosy, healthy-looking child running about the place swinging a base-ball bat?'"'

"Well, hardly!" laughed the Doctor. "Six weeks spent in even that wonderful Georgia of

which Wilhelmina never tires of boasting, will scarcely work such a transformation."

"But I am going to 'make a most beauty, grand s'prise for you,' as Berta would say; and if my cheeks are not—I won't say as *round* as hers—as rosy as even you would like them to be, I agree to take all the pure Norwegian cod-liver oil or any other horrid stuff you prescribe. But you must let me know the exact day when you will come."

"Hm! Wish to get out your paint box in time, do you? No use. I shall carry a wet sponge to test all suspicious-looking roses."

"Never you mind, Uncle! My roses won't wash off. But you are telling me all that I must do, and you haven't said one word about taking care of yourself. Really, Uncle, that is one thing that you don't know how to do. I wish you would learn."

"But why waste precious time and energy when I have two such efficient guardian angels as you and Mother?"

"But we won't be with you now. By the way, sir, it seems to me that your rubbers spend most of their time in the little room where we children hang our every-day coats and hats."

The Doctor chuckled. "I shouldn't be at all surprised if that is where they are at present. Never mind; I shall invest in a new pair on my way back to the office, unless you think rubber boots would be better; and I shall purchase the

very largest umbrella that I can find. If it will ease your mind any, I am quite ready to promise to wear the former and carry the latter opened, even when the streets need sprinkling."

"Now, Uncle! Nobody expects you to make a goose of yourself. Oh, please don't go yet!" She laid a detaining hand on his arm as he took out his watch and rose to his feet. "I have something so important to ask you. Do sit down for just a little minute."

"Well, what is this important matter for the sake of which I must risk being carried off to the next station?" The Doctor resumed his seat.

"I wish it would take me so long to tell it that we would be away down in Georgia before I had finished. You will go out soon to see Aunt Mary, won't you, Uncle?"

"I shall probably run out to Bird-a-Lea Sunday to see that Jerry has carried out instructions; and, of course, I shall go over to Maryvale. Why? is there something you wish me to tell Aunt Mary?"

"No, Uncle; it is about Florence. I—could you—would you mind, Uncle—"

"Could I, would I, should I,—what is it all about? The minutes are flying, you know."

"When you go out to see Aunt Mary, would you mind asking her to call Florence to the parlor for a little while? Now that her grandmother is dead, she hasn't a relative that she knows of in

the whole world. She seems to think so much of us, and I know that it will make her glad if you ask to see her. This morning, Wilhelmina and I went up to the infirmary to say good-bye to her. She has been there a week trying to get over a dreadful cold, and she looked so lonely."

"By all means I shall ask to see her, not only Sunday, but every time I go out to Maryvale."

"Oh, that will be lovely! And will you take her some candy or fruit?"

"To be sure I shall. You mean the little gray-eyed owl who knitted me that beautiful silk muffer for Christmas, don't you? Your friends at Maryvale are so numerous that I have some difficulty in remembering their names."

"Yes, Uncle, that is Florence—Florence Berkeley—the one you and Father like to speak French with."

"And English, too. That child is wonderfully well informed for one so young. Her grandmother must have been a very intellectual old lady. Indeed, I shall enjoy a little visit with Florence, I assure you."

"O Uncle, I *am* so glad that I asked you! I was afraid you might not have time. Just imagine how happy she will be, and how she will look forward to your visits. Florence thinks that you are *perfectly grand!*"

"Indeed! Another inducement for calling on her!"

"And she has always thought so. Before she ever met you, even before I had told her one thing about you, she had you all fixed up exactly right in her mind."

"Well, well! A miniature Sherlock Holmes, is she?"

"Sherlock Holmes? Oh, now I remember! He is the man who wrote *The Acrobat of the Breakfast Table.*"

"The what?"

"Now, Uncle, you needn't be laughing. I'm sure that is right. His picture and the names of his books are in that game of *Authors* that Wilhelmina got for Christmas. But Sherlock doesn't sound quite right for his first name. I think it begins with an O—Oscar—Oswald—Oliver; that's it. Oliver Wendell Holmes. Have we that book of his, Uncle? I imagine that it is just as funny as it can be. An acrobat is a man who can turn somersaults and stand on his head and do all sorts of things, isn't he? But I don't see how in the world he could act like that on a breakfast table."

"Neither do I. Better play that game again and take a closer look at your *Acrobat of the Breakfast Table.* Ha! ha! ha! Ask your father whether he has ever read that particular work of Oliver Wendell Holmes—"

"All aboard!" from without interrupted him.

"Good-bye, pet. Take care of yourself and

scribble me a line now and then with your left hand."

"I shall, Uncle; and when you come, I hope I shall be able to make up for this stingy half hug that I'm giving you. Oh, I wish, wish, *wish* you could come now! Can't you, Uncle?" pleaded the child, clinging to him with one little arm.

"Impossible, dear; but six weeks will pass very quickly. Good-bye, little girl!"

"Good-bye, dear, *dear* Uncle!" And he was gone.

And now, as Mary lay back on the pillows, gazing out at the dim, fleeting landscape, there rose before her the picture of the little library with its lonely occupant awaiting Liza's summons to dinner.

"Poor, dear Uncle," she murmured. "I shall write him a letter this very evening and ask Father to send it by special delivery so he will get it before he goes to bed.....But no, that won't do; because by the time it reaches New York and goes to the postoffice, it will be so late that the messenger boy might have to wake Uncle in the middle of the night. I shall send it the ordinary way, and he will have it for breakfast."

The door swung open a little, and, catching a glimpse of Wilhelmina, she wondered what was keeping her little friend so quiet. Then a figure obstructed her view, and the next moment Mrs. Selwyn stood in the doorway.

"Come in, Mother, I'm awake."

"I have peeped in several times, but you seemed to be asleep. It is time to brush up a little for dinner. Yours will be brought in here, and Father will take care of Mary Elizabeth and have his dinner later with Wilhelmina. She wishes to wait for him as she has not quite finished a book that she is reading. It must be very interesting, for she has been poring over it the greater part of the afternoon. Yes, Beth, come in, dear." Mrs. Selwyn held out her hand to the child, who had hesitatingly pushed the door a little wider open.

"Will you tell Berta it is time to have her face and hands washed before dinner?"

CHAPTER III

FOUR PROPER HOURS

"I wonder whether you and I can find room in here, Mary Elizabeth." Mr. Selwyn with the Marvin baby in his arms entered the little room.

"Yes, yes, Father, come in!" cried Mary.

"Still primping, eh?" He tweaked Berta's ear. "I have reserved tables in the dining-car, Mother, and the sooner you take possession of them the better."

"We are ready now, Father. Come, little folks."

"Put Mary 'Lisbeth right here beside me, Father. These pillows will keep her from bumping herself against the wall."

"I think I had better hold her until you have had your dinner, Mary. I have arranged to have it brought in at once. Here is the first course."

A waiter with a table appeared in the doorway.

"Father, have you your fountain pen with you? I didn't expect to write letters on the train, so Mother packed mine."

"You are quite welcome to mine; but are you sufficiently expert with your left hand to write a letter? how about dictating it to me?"

"Oh, that will be ever so much easier for me. I should like to send a little letter to Uncle so that he will have it the first thing in the morning. He must be so lonely tonight without us. And then

there are some things that I wish to ask Aunt Mary to do. I was thinking about them before Mother came in. You know Florence, Father. She isn't well, and she has been in the infirmary for a whole week. She does enjoy books and games and puzzles so much that I am going to ask Aunt Mary to let her go over and amuse herself with mine as soon as she is able to be out."

"But the child could not remain in the house more than a few minutes, because it will not be heated, you know."

"I thought of that; but couldn't Aunt Mary tell Jerry to turn on the heater in my room and have it warm for Florence? Of course, she would have to let him know when to expect her."

"Yes, that can be very easily arranged. Your little friend is a rather lonely child, isn't she?"

"Yes, Father. You see she had never been with children until she came to Maryvale last year. I do wish the girls would try to know her better. She is the dearest little thing; but they don't like her old-fashioned ways."

"Well, I am sure that your plan will make her happy. There is no reason why Jerry cannot take her and some of the other little girls for an occasional sleighride."

"Oh, put that in the letter, too, Father."

Wilhelmina entered the room just in time to hear the last remark.

"You don't mean to say that you're writing

letters before you get there, Mary! You haven't arrived yet; so how can you say you had a safe journey and all such things that people expect to hear? I know I'll have to write letters after I'm home a day or two. There are Mother Madeline and Sister Austin and Sister Dominic and my other teachers—dear, me! each one of them can hardly expect a separate letter. I'd lose all the strength I've gained, and Uncle Frank would be as cross as two sticks. I should think I could say, 'My dear Teachers,' and let it go at that. Hope none of them will answer, because then I would have to write again."

"If Aunt Mary and the Sisters could hear you, they would be highly complimented," laughed Mr. Selwyn.

"I wonder whether you feel that way when you write to me, Wilhelmina." Mary's eyes danced.

"Well, Mary! As if I could! When I write to you or to Uncle Frank, I say just what I would if I were talking to you; and I know you won't mind if I make a few mistakes. But with Mother Madeline and the Sisters, I have to keep my eyes glued on the dictionary nearly all the time, and I feel that I must be as prim and proper as—as *Aunt Wilhelmina!* You haven't met her, so you have no idea how proper she is. I simply can't believe that she is Father's really, truly sister. Grandmother Marvin must have adopted her before Father was old enough to know the difference. And then to name *me* after her!"

"But why should you feel prim and proper while writing to Aunt Mary and your teachers? This is your third year at Maryvale; and, as you have a very sociable disposition, you can scarcely feel timid with them. I assure you they would enjoy the sort of letter you write to Mary and Uncle Frank far more than the prim and proper kind. To be perfectly candid, I cannot conceive of your being able to write the latter; and since you have discovered the true art of letter writing, which consists in writing to your friends as you would speak to them, by all means cultivate it. No one can expect a little girl of your age to compose a letter absolutely free from mistakes. Do you commence these prim and proper epistles with, 'I take my pen in hand to write you these few lines to let you know that I am well, hoping you are the same'?"

"It's not quite so bad as that, Uncle Rob. But I think I *shall* write the easy way to the Sisters; and if they save the letters to show me all the mistakes in them, I'll tell them what you've said about letter-writing. You are *one* person, at least, that they can't call to time."

"Very well. I shall shoulder all the responsibility. Where is the book that you were so anxious to finish?"

"I can't say that I was anxious to finish it, Uncle Rob. I was anxious to find even one page in it worth reading. Of all the dry old things!"

And I chose it because I thought from its name that it would be funny. You see, Uncle Rob, now that I have a little sister, I must try to be more civilized. After a year or two, Mother will be holding me up as a model to Mary 'Lisbeth just as she does Phil to the boys; so I'll have to begin to practice right away if I ever expect to be a model in anything. I have often and often pitied poor Phil; but now my turn has come. I've sowed my wild oats and will have to settle down. It didn't matter so much when the rest of the family were boys; but now it's altogether different; and if my prayers are answered the way I wish them to be, I'll surely have to mind my p's and q's."

"How is that?"

"Oh, I forgot that you don't know about it, Uncle Rob. I'm praying for six more little sisters so that we'll be even with the boys. But I began to tell you about that silly book. At the very last minute before we left Bird-a-Lea, I remembered that I would need something to help me to be dignified; and Aunt 'Lisbeth said to take any book I liked from the library. She did tell me the exact bookcase to look in; but there was so much going on that I opened the one nearest the door and took out a good thick book with a funny name. But though I've turned over every page in it, I haven't found a thing to laugh at. Why, at the end the young man is left standing on the bridge, looking out over the water! He hadn't even sense

enough to jump in. Not that I like to read a book about susancide and murder and such things; but no one cares for a book where the hero is such a stick as that one. I thought the story would be about a man who had chills and did all sorts of funny things to keep warm; or else about a dog-house that was cold, and perhaps the poor dog did tricks to warm himself."

"A man who had chills or a cold dog-house." Mr. Selwyn looked puzzled. "I thought I knew the titles of all the books in the library, but I have no recollection of one that would suggest such ideas. How did you pronounce the name?"

"I haven't tried to pronounce it, Uncle Rob. The nearest I can come to it is 'Kennel Chilly,' but there are more letters in the second word. A duke or a lord—yes, it was Lord Bulwarks Someone-or-other who wrote the book."

"Lord Bulwarks—you don't mean to say that you have spent the afternoon pouring over one of Bulwer-Lytton's novels!" Mr. Selwyn threw back his head, laughing heartily. "Well, well, well! You poor child! You are surely going beyond your depth in your efforts to be dignified. And *Kenelm Chillingly* no less! Aunt Mary and your teachers will be properly impressed if you tell them how you have spent the afternoon."

"I'm not going to tell anyone, Uncle Rob, and don't you, either. Dear me! I'm just worn out and starved besides."

"Help yourself here," said Mary sympathetically. "I have finished all but dessert. Some fruit and bread and butter can't spoil your dinner. Father, may we give Mary 'Lisbeth some ice-cream—just a little taste?"

"Oh, yes, Uncle Rob! It's plain vanilla, so it can't hurt her. Just some of the melted part."

"I fear your mother might have some objection." Mr. Selwyn was decidedly dubious. "Well, a few drops—no more," as Wilhelmina held the spoon to the baby's lips.

"Look! isn't she darling? She likes it. See how she sticks her little tongue out for more. There, precious, that's all you can have. Hurry and eat it, Mary, so she won't see it and cry for more."

"She will probably do that in any case. Saying, 'All gone,' to little folks as young as she is has no special effect. Let me have that apple to roll around to amuse her and make her forget the ice-cream; and you had better take some bread and butter as Mary suggested."

CHAPTER IV

SUNNYMEAD

The following morning found the train rushing onward through a driving rain, which dashed against the windows, shutting out even the faintest glimpse of the landscape. The two mothers could not repress a sigh at the thought of the long, long day before them, during which their ingenuity would be taxed to the utmost to provide amusement for the restless little people, who, now that the novelty of the trip had somewhat worn off, were beginning to question, "Shall we soon be home, Mother?" "Is we almost there, Mother?" "Will it stop raining soon, Daddy, so we can see nice things out the window, same as yesterday?"

"If it would only let up until we get home, it wouldn't be half so bad," growled Frank to Bob and Freddie.

"Yes," agreed Bob, "I'd be willing to have it rain for a week straight then. We'd have something to do with all the books and games that we got for Christmas and didn't have time to do more than look at. Weren't we the chumps not to bring a few of them with us?"

"Well, it thertainly theemed thort of thilly to take bookth and gameth to Bird-a-Lea, 'cauth Willie hath alwayth thaid Mary hath loadth of thuch thingth. Anyway, the valitheth were tho chuck full that Mothah couldn't thqueeth a thingle book or game into one of them."

Fortunately, all but two or three of the passengers had left the sleeper at Richmond so that our little party had the car almost to themselves. By noon, to the great delight of all, the sky showed signs of clearing; and after luncheon the younger members of both families were prevailed upon to take a nap with the hope that the sun would be shining when they awoke.

* * * * *

"There are the Marvin rigs. Must be the family is expected home this evening." The station master rose from his creaking armchair and strolled across the room to the telegraph operator's desk.

"Yes, didn't I tell you that a message came yesterday afternoon for Miss Walker? She's the governess. They say she gets a mighty fine salary; but I bet she earns every cent of it trying to teach that bunch of live wires. What's the idea of the wagonette, I wonder? The carriage looks big enough to hold what's left of them. The three oldest boys must be in school by this time—Joe told me he was going with his brothers."

"Well, those youngsters need plenty of room, you know. Train's coming!..... Say, look at this! How many kids has Marvin, anyway? They're piling out of that sleeper thick as flies."

"Eight boys and the girl that's away at school and the new baby,—a girl, too, I heard. The girl at school was mixed up in a fire and was too

sick after it to come home for the holidays; so the whole family went North to spend Christmas with her."

"Well, she's home from school, all right, and——by jinks! I count three more girls! Wonder if Marvin has taken to adopting a few. Seems to me I'd be satisfied with ten of my own. Hold on! There's a strange lady and gentleman, too."

"Where have I seen that yellow-haired girl before? I have it! She was here visiting the Marvins two summers ago. And those must be her folks that were shipwrecked and supposed to be lost. Don't you remember the cablegram from France last summer saying some of them were found at Lourdes? and another a few weeks later about the father? Selkirk——no, Sel——Selwyn! That's the name. He's a big banker in New York. To hear my boy, Bill, tell about the excitement at Sunnymead when he delivered that second message——why, he came back a heap faster than he went; tumbled off his wheel and dashed in here with his eyes almost popping out of his head, and declared that a man who had been dead for more than two years had come to life again. Don't you remember? Later that day I got the straight of the story, or at least as much as he knew, from young Phil. Then the whole family went to New York to meet the steamer the Selwyns were coming on. I must say the Marvins were as happy over it all as if the Selwyns were

some of their own family. And they're no kin at all, though the youngsters call the grown folks uncle and aunt."

Unconscious of the interest they were arousing, our party moved towards the waiting vehicles. The ladies and the little girls found room in the carriage, while the boys tumbled into the family wagonette with Mr. Marvin and Mr. Selwyn.

"Just five miles more and we shall be home," said Wilhelmina when all were settled and the carriage rolling swiftly along the hard, white road.

"This road leads straight out to Sunnymead without a turn, Mother," explained Mary, "and there are the most beautiful homes on both sides of it. Sunnymead is farthest from town. Quite a distance beyond it are the pine woods, and then comes the sea."

For some moments Wilhelmina silently studied Mary's face. Then, "You won't mind looking at the sea now, Mary, will you? do you remember how you felt about it when you were here before?"

"Indeed I do, Wilhelmina. At that time I thought Mother and the twinnies were somewhere away down in it; but now, everything is different; and I hope we shall take that drive through the woods while we are here. I can almost smell the pines and hear them whispering." The little girl watched eagerly for landmarks which had grown familiar to her during her former visit; and when

four miles of the distance had been covered, she called her mother's attention to a narrow road running northward. "That leads to Ephraim's little farm, Mother. Father will go to see him the very first thing, I know. He is the old darkey who, in spite of Aunt Bertha, stayed at Cedar Ridge to welcome you and Father when you went there on your wedding trip. Don't you remember?"

"Yes, dear, I could not forget that faithful old man; and I shall certainly go with Father to see him."

A few moments later Wilhelmina exclaimed: "Here we are, Aunt 'Lisbeth. Sunnymead begins at this stone wall. Sam will whistle soon for Wash to open the gates. My, but it's good to get home! There's Wash! George Washington Johnson." And she and Mary waved to the black boy who had swung open the big iron gates and stood staring at the strangers in the carriage.

"Welcome home, Missus! Howdy, Miss Willie! Why, dah's Miss May-ree, sho's yo' bohn! Howdy, Miss May-ree!"

"Wash lives with his mother in that little stone house just inside the gates, Mother," explained Mary; and then her eyes wandered over the beautiful grounds until the big, old-fashioned house with its wide, airy verandas came into view. Miss Walker was on the steps to welcome them, and the servants, Lyda, Jinny, and old Aunt Chloe

stood in the doorway, smiling and courtesying.

The dinner which followed was a jolly meal, though Jack did fall asleep before it was over, and Dick and Berta and Beth had to wink very hard so as not to follow his example.

A few days later, Mary received the following letter from her aunt in reply to the one which her father had written for her on the train:

“Dear Mary,

“Florence was delighted to have word from you so soon and to hear of your plans to give her so much pleasure. I fear, however, that it will be some time before she will be able to carry them out. The cold from which she was suffering when you left became so much worse that the doctor fears it may result in a serious illness. But we shall hope for the best; and as soon as she is able to read, Sister Austin and I shall go over to Bird-a-Lea for a number of your books and games so that she will have something to amuse her while she is obliged to remain in the infirmary.

“Jerry had a telephone message from Uncle Frank, the result being a beautiful bouquet which he brings Florence every morning. She is almost as fond of flowers as you are, and insists on having them placed before the statue of our Blessed Mother in the infirmary.

“I expect a visit from Uncle Frank Sunday afternoon.”

Then followed messages to the other members of the family and to Mr. and Mrs. Marvin.

Mary went at once to Wilhelmina. "Will you write a letter to Florence for me if I tell you what to say, Wilhelmina? She is very sick, and I can't write with my left hand, you know. We shall make it a long, long letter, telling her everything that has happened since we left Bird-a-Lea."

This was the first of the many letters which Wilhelmina wrote for Mary to her little friend—letters describing Sunnymead; the long drives through the surrounding country, particularly the one, now Mary's favorite, through the woods to the sea; the visit to Ephraim's little farm, and the faithful old darkey's delight at once more meeting his beloved "Massa Rob"; the books which she and Wilhelmina were reading together.

But poor little Florence could not answer these letters. Pneumonia had set in as a result of her stolen visit to Bird-a-Lea; and it was through Mother Madeline and Doctor Carlton that Mary heard from the little invalid. They thought it wiser that she should not know that Florence's heart had been much weakened by her illness; and Mary was often puzzled because the little girl was sick so long and one or other of the boarders should be obliged to read aloud the books which she knew Florence would much better enjoy reading to herself.

Sometimes, too, Mary felt perplexed in regard

to Wilhelmina. She had feared that her helpless arm and general lack of strength would, in a measure, interfere with her little friend's pleasure; and to prevent this, she repeatedly urged Wilhelmina to join the boys in their games while she remained on the porch with an interesting book. But this Wilhelmina refused to do; and Mary wondered whether she, too, still felt the effects of her illness. Not once since her return home had she mounted her beloved Dixie; and when Frank and Bob tried one morning to persuade her to drive to town with them, she was almost harsh in her refusal, though Mary had seen the eager light in her eyes as the pony cart came around the driveway. After the boys had driven away, Mary made up her mind to speak.

"Wilhelmina, I do hope it's not on my account that you are giving up all the things you like to do. I don't expect that, you know, and I would feel ever so much better if you would go ahead and do just as you would do if I were not here."

"That's exactly what I am doing, Mary. I'm not giving up a single thing for you. Indeed, I don't know what I would do if you were not here."

But as the days passed, Wilhelmina became more and more restless, and a wistful expression crept into her dark eyes. The old, fun-loving, mischievous, care-free Wilhelmina was gone; and Mary felt that the change was not for the better.

CHAPTER V

A CURTAIN LECTURE AND ITS RESULTS

"Yes, Bob, I mean it! Every, single, solitary word! For two whole weeks at Bird-a-Lea, you and Frank could behave yourselves and show that you've had some bringing up; but the minute you got home, you seemed to forget all your manners." And Wilhelmina, seated in a porch chair, cast a withering look upon the boy at the foot of the side steps.

"Gee whiz, Willie! you can't expect a fellow to act as if he's dressed up all the time. Nobody wants us to behave the same in overalls as we do in our best suits."

"Hm! I wonder how many times Mother has said that a gentleman hasn't two sets of manners —one for company and the other for his family."

"Who's said anything about our manners? I bet Uncle Rob and Aunt 'Lisbeth would say that ours are just as good here as they were at Bird-a-Lea. We surely had a jolly good time there even though we were comp'ny, and we weren't always thinking about our manners, either. And when a fellow's in his own home, he ought to be able to do a few things that he wouldn't do when he's away visiting."

"That all depends on what the things are. If you would be satisfied to play your tricks on me

or the boys, it wouldn't be so bad; but I draw the line when you begin on my guest."

"Huh! *your* guest! Mary is just as much *our* guest as she is yours. Just because she's a girl and goes to the same school as you do and invites you to her home doesn't make her any more *your* guest than ours. And I've told you fifty times that we didn't bring that snake here to play tricks on anybody, least of all on Mary. And what's more, she knows we didn't. It was different from any snake we had ever seen, and we just thought both of you would like to see it, too."

"But you know perfectly well how Mary hates snakes and bugs and all such things."

"We never thought of that. If we had remembered, we would have come and told her about that snake, and then she needn't have looked at it if she didn't want to. I don't see why she hates such things when they're so int'rusting. But I s'pose it's because she's a girl. Beth's just like her. They can't help being scary. But Berta's a good sport——more like you——I mean like you *used* to be. Say, Willie, what's the matter with you, anyway? Frank and I have been wondering ever since we came home; and after we went to bed last night, we tried to decide whether you're different because you were one of the heroesses at the fire, or because you were so sick after it. But we can't see why you couldn't help to keep the convent from burning down, and why you couldn't

save Mary from freezing to death, or why you couldn't be sick and get over it without turning into a prim, prissy, proper old maid like Aunt Wilhelmina——”

His sister bounced out of her chair, her eyes blazing. “*Robert Lee Marvin!* How dare you say such a thing!”

“Because it's true.” Bob grinned wickedly. Realizing that he had scored a point, he had no intention of losing it, so continued, “But it's only half of the truth. The whole is that you're a hundred times worse than she is, because she's grown up, and it's natural for her to be prim and proper; but you're not even two whole years older than we are——”

“Bob, I think you're just dreadful! I am *not* like Aunt Wilhelmina, and I *never was*, and I *never will be!* It's bad enough to be named after her——”

“That's exactly what we all think, and we call you Willie or Bill or Sis so's we won't be reminded of her so often. But there isn't much use changing your name if you're going to keep on copying her.”

“I'm *not* copying her! Why, she makes everyone miserable when she comes to visit——”

“Yes, and aren't you doing the very same thing? It's been noting but ‘Bob, don't do *this!*’ and ‘Frank, don't do *that!*’ and ‘Freddie, don't do the *other thing!*’ and ‘Dick, where *are* your manners?’

and 'Jack, I'm surprised at you!' ever since we got home. I'd much rather have Aunt Wilhelmina come to visit us once in a while, because she never stays more than a week——'"

"That's a nice way to talk to your only sister——'"

"Oho! what's the baby, I'd like to know? You can't bluff us with such speeches any more. And Frank and I are going to see that Mary 'Lisbeth is properly trained. No more Aunt Wilhelminas in *this* family, thank you! But there's just one thing for you to remember. When we grow up and get married, don't expect to be invited to visit *us*. Maybe Phil will take pity on you just as Father does on Aunt Wilhelmina; but you needn't think Frank and I are going to be martyred *all* our lives by Aunt Wilhelminas."

This rather lengthy speech for Bob gave his sister time to regain her composure. With a fine air of indifference she seated herself and idly turned the leaves of her book while she rapidly considered what she should say to regain the upper hand.

"My, my! You must have stayed awake all night preparing that speech. You are certainly very respectful toward Father's only sister——'"

"Huh! I notice you just finished saying a few things about her your own self."

"Well, if you had to go through life with such a name, I think you'd feel that you had a perfect

right to say a few things. You seem to think you have a right to say and do anything you like, anyhow. But there's one thing you *can't* do, and that is play tricks on Mary. I've made up mind that Father is going to hear of the very next one you try, and that's not tattling, either. Mother says it isn't tattling when we tell her or Father things to keep someone from being injured; and Mary isn't well yet by any means, and the fright that old snake gave her will probably make her sick for this whole day, at least."

"Aw, shucks, Willie! Mary has more sense than to be frightened by a dead snake. She just ran into the house because she hates to look at such things. Besides, she isn't sick any more. She told us last night that she feels as well as ever, only she can't run very fast or do much with her arm. I'm willing to bet that if you would behave yourself and act as you did when she was here the summer before last, she would get stronger much faster than by just sitting on the porch or walking around a little. We know Mary better than you think we do."

"Maybe you do; but you can't possibly know her as well as I do or you wouldn't act like such Indians. It's really too bad for your own sakes. Mary has always liked you so much. Why, my head used to go up about six inches whenever she told anyone about my twin brothers. But you have certainly given her reason enough to change

her mind about you. Oh, no, she won't *show* it. She will be just as dear and sweet as ever. But she can't help *feeling* insulted at the way you and Frank have acted."

"I don't believe she's one bit insulted!" Bob emphasized his opinion by a vicious kick at the lowest step. "I tell you she has more sense than——"

Mary's appearance in the doorway cut short his retort, and turning abruptly on his heel, he walked slowly away. Mary watched him for a few moments, a puzzled expression in her eyes; then she turned to Wilhelmina deeply absorbed in her book. "What in the world is the matter with Bob? I have never seen him look like that before."

"W——ell,——no,——I haven't either." Wilhelmina squirmed uneasily in her chair.

"It's the very first time I have seen him walk when he is outdoors. He always goes with a hop, skip, and a jump. What ails him? He must be sick."

"Oh, no, I just gave him a piece of my mind about a few things. He needed it pretty badly."

Mary's eyes followed the boy, who, with lowered head, kept on his way toward the grove some distance back of the house. When he had disappeared among the trees, she regarded Wilhelmina for some moments in silence. The latter felt her steady gaze, but kept her eyes glued on her book.

"Wilhelmina, I do hope you haven't said anything to him about that snake. I'm a perfect goose about such things; but no matter how I try, I can't get over the horror the very sight of them gives me."

"Oh, I think most girls are like that—city girls, anyway. And you haven't lived long enough in the country to get used to them."

"But Berta doesn't mind them one bit. I have seen her pick up big, woolly caterpillars and hold them against her cheek——ugh! But Beth almost has a spasm if one of them crawls on her dress. No, I think it is just in some people to have a horror of such things, and it ought to be taken out of them. A girl my size running from a *dead* snake! Why, I know very well that Frank and Bob wouldn't carry a live one around that way if it was a dangerous kind. So I hope the piece of your mind didn't have anything in it about that snake."

No response.

"Did it, Wilhelmina?"

"Now, Mary, don't you mind whether it did or not. The boys must stop tormenting you,—that's all there is about it."

"*Tormenting me!* Wilhelmina! How can you say such a thing! They have been just wonderful to me—every one of them. And the way Bob and Frank and Freddie let the twins tag after them, and the care they take not to let them get hurt—

oh, dear! I'm going right straight after Bob. I knew he was hurt about something."

"You will never catch up with him now. He has gone down the hill to the creek, and you can't tell which way he will go when he gets there. He always goes down there when he is out of sorts. Let him alone. He'll get over his sulks."

Around the corner of the house dashed Frank. "Where's Bob? Was he around here yet? He was coming to ask Mary if we couldn't take her watch in to town to have a new crystal put on it."

"He was here a few minutes ago, but he didn't say anything about the watch. Mary was in the house, so I suppose he forgot about it. He has gone down to the creek."

"Down to the creek! And he left me saddling the ponies so we could start for town right away! Look here, Willie, what have you been saying to Bob to make him go off by himself like that?"

"Go after him, Frank," suggested Mary, "and ask him to bring that snake back here. I didn't take a very good look at it, you know. But I am going to begin right here to get over my silliness. While you are gone, I shall get my watch. I feel lost without it."

From a window upstairs, Mary watched Frank until he, too, had entered the grove. Then she decided to remain where she was until she should see the two boys returning; for she was really annoyed as well as surprised that Wilhelmina should

make so much of a trifle as to plunge Bob into such evident dejection. The situation was an awkward one. She felt that her little friend was over-anxious about her; and just how to avoid hurting Wilhelmina while assuring Bob that she herself was not in the least offended was a rather perplexing problem. She felt that she had made a fairly good beginning, and was busy planning her next move when she was startled by shrill cries for help coming from beyond the grove. Down the stairs and out on the porch she flew, only to find Wilhelmina comfortably rocking and reading.

"*Wilhelmina!* are you *deaf!* Didn't you hear Frank shouting for help? Something *terrible* has happened! *Come!*"

But to Mary's unbounded amazement, Wilhelmina looked up at her with a placid smile. "Don't you know those two yet, Mary? This is just some new trick to get us down the hill so we shall have the trouble of climbing it again. Sit down and make yourself comfortable. Where is your watch?"

"I dropped it on the dresser and ran when I heard Frank scream—*there! listen!* That's no joke, Wilhelmina! There's Bob, too! They couldn't make their voices sound like that in fun." And Mary, ignoring Wilhelmina's laughing protests, ran down the steps and off toward the grove. She wondered that she saw no one else hurrying to answer the cries, and then remembered that

her father and mother had gone for a long drive with Mrs. Marvin, and that Mr. Marvin was directing the work in the most distant fields of the plantation. Fred and the younger children had, only a short while before, passed with the goat cart down the drive toward the gates.

"Oh, if Wilhelmina would only come! There *is* something the matter—I know there is! and what can *I* do with my arm as weak as a cat's paw? Maybe a poisonous snake has bitten them." She shuddered, thinking of her father's experience in India. On she ran through the grove, pausing to snatch up a short, thick piece of bough and longing to sink down at the foot of a tree to rest; for she had not fully recovered her strength, and this was her first attempt at violent exercise. But the frantic yells of the two boys urged her on until she reached the steep hill descending to the creek, where she stopped abruptly with a gasp of dismay. Whirling about, she made a trumpet of her hands and tried to scream; but her throat was parched. Her hands fell helpless to her sides, the right one brushing her pocket. The next instant the whistle which she always carried was at her lips, cutting the air with its long, shrill blasts, and she was racing and stumbling down the hill to the stepping stones leading across the creek. The land on the opposite side was low and marshy, and some yards to the east was a quagmire. Close to the edge of it on a little patch of solid ground stood Frank,

vainly striving to pull Bob out of the thick, green ooze into which he was rapidly sinking. He shouted a warning. "Look out, Mary, look out! If you make a false step, you're a goner! This little hump I'm standing on seems solid enough, and the grasses and weeds that I'm hanging on to are tough if the roots will only hold."

"Oh, isn't there *something* I can do, Frank?"

"Keep on blowing that whistle until help comes so we won't have to waste our strength yelling. Oh, I know something! Hop over here.—Look out! don't slip!—That's it. Now stand on the roots of these things, or kneel or do anything that will throw your whole weight on them so I won't pull them up. Now, Bob, I have a better hold on them. Steady, old chap! A good pull, and I'll have you out! One—two—three!"

Bob, clinging desperately to the end of the leather belt which Frank had thrown him, seconded his brother's efforts by twisting and squirming valiantly to free himself from the slime which was steadily drawing him down into its depths.

There was a yell from the top of the hill. "Coming, Bob, coming!" Mary's whistle had proved to Wilhelmina that no joke was in progress, and she had responded to the first blast. Down to the creek she dashed, cleared it in two leaps, and gained the hummock where Mary and Frank stood. "Are you able to run back for help, Mary?"

"Oh, I'll do anything, Wilhelmina! But there wasn't a soul in sight when I came down."

"Get anyone! Aunt Chloe, Lyda, Jinny, even Fred! Have them bring a rope—a clothes line will do—and a plank—a strong plank! I'm afraid Frank and I can't get Bob out, but we can keep him from sinking deeper. I oughtn't to ask you to run all the way back, but my arms are stronger than yours. Keep on blowing the whistle and some of the men may hear it."

"Oh, I'm glad to go, *glad!*!" And Mary, somewhat rested, was off up the hill.

CHAPTER VI

A CLOSE CALL

Wilhelmina caught up the stick which Mary had flung aside, drove it into the ground behind Frank, and bracing her foot against it, grasped her brother firmly around the waist. "Now, let go of the weeds and grab the belt with both hands, Frank, and perhaps we *can* pull Bob out ourselves."

"You'll never do it. Pulling is no good when there's something a million times stronger than you two sucking me down. I must have something to brace my feet against before you can get me out of this. A plank is the only thing that will keep me from going under; but at the rate I'm sinking, the chances of getting one here in time are mighty slim."

"No, they're not, Bob, they're *not!*" insisted Wilhelmina. "And Lyda and Jinny are very strong. Aunt Chloe isn't much good—she's too big and fat—but she's better than nothing. She can throw her weight on this end of the board after we slip it under your feet, and you'll be out in no time. Mary won't stop at them, either. She'll find some of the men. Oh, if I had only thought to tell her to blow the horn! That would bring Father and all the help on the place in double quick time."

"If she meets Fred, maybe he'll think of it. Stop squirming, Bob, and rest a few seconds. Then

we'll try again. Why in thunder didn't you come, Willie, when I first yelled. I was at the top of the hill, and Bob hadn't sunk far in then."

"I thought you were trying to play a joke on us. You know very well, Frank, that I wouldn't have delayed a second if I had thought anything was the matter. It was Mary's whistle that told me there was. Let's pull again. Ready, Bob!"

Another vain attempt, and all hope of extricating Bob by their unaided efforts died out of the hearts of the girl and boy, who began to doubt whether their united strength would be sufficient to keep him from sinking before help arrived. It was only with great difficulty that Wilhelmina restrained Frank from going in after him.

"Not yet, Frank, not yet," she whispered close to his ear. "We may both have to do it if they don't come soon; but wait a few minutes. We mustn't let him know how fast he's sinking. Keep on saying things so he won't give up, and pray in between." Then aloud, "Don't try to wriggle and squirm any more, Bob. You will just tire yourself for nothing; and it's easier for us to keep you from sinking when you hold still."

"He's too played out to do anything *but* hold still," growled Frank over his shoulder.

"I know, I know; but we mustn't let him feel that we think so." And Wilhelmina fixed her eyes on the hilltop, praying that help would soon arrive. She had sometimes questioned which one

of her brothers she loved best—tall, handsome Phil with the black, curly hair and dark eyes characteristic of the Marvins generally; book-loving Harry, “the oddity,” as his brothers laughingly called him, because he alone had his mother’s blue eyes and auburn hair; Joe, her almost constant companion when they were home together; the jolly, rollicking twins; Freddie with his drawling lisp and droll ways; sturdy little Dick; or roly poly Jack—and she had usually decided in favor of Phil, probably because he teased her less and made something of a pet of his little sister. But now there was no doubt in her mind that she loved Bob the best—dear, fun-loving, mischievous Bob, who plagued her unmercifully in season and out of season; Bob whose hands were never clean, and whose shoes were never half blacked; Bob, so like herself in a thousand and one ways; Bob, on whom she had vented her ill temper not half an hour before and for whose present awful plight she alone was responsible! She gulped hard and looked again at his white, strained face now so much nearer the slimy, green ooze. “Dear God, dear God, make them come!” she murmured. “Oh, what is keeping them?”

“That’s what I say. Mary has certainly had time to get back to the house. Here, grab this strap. I’m going in!”

But Bob, thoroughly exhausted, protested. “No, Frank—don’t you—do it.—I—won’t — have it.—

One's—enough.—I guess—Mary caved in—before—she found—anyone.”

His words were an echo of the fear which for some moments had been gripping the hearts of the other two. But Wilhelmina was determined that he should not know it.

“No, Frank, I’m the one who is going in. If they’re not at the top of the hill by the time I count sixty, I won’t wait another second. I’m responsible for this. And Bob, you just stop talking that way. Mary isn’t the caving in kind. She’ll find someone before she gives up. You’re not going to sink into that dirty, filthy slime, because I’m going to stand behind you and get hold of you under your arms and keep you up until they come. Oh, yes, I’ll sink some, too; but Frank will have time to get help before I go down very far.”

“Not with me—a dead weight—on your hands.—I wish—you’d tell—Father—that I didn’t come here—on purpose.” Because of the quagmire, Mr. Marvin had expressly forbidden crossing the creek. “Tell him—I just wasn’t—thinking—where I was—going, and—I got—into this—before—I knew it.”

“Aw, quit it, Bob! You can tell him your own self after we get you out of this and up to the house.”

“*I’m* going to tell Father about this whole thing myself, Bob. If I hadn’t been so cranky and mean and cantankerous, it would never have happened.

O Bob, I want to take back every word I said. Mary *does* know that you haven't been playing tricks on her, and she *isn't* hurt or insulted about a single thing that you have *ever* done, and she thinks the *world* of you, and that you are grand with Berta and Beth, and—and—Bob, *will* you forgive me for being so horrid?"

"It's all—right, Willie,—and you're not—like Aunt Wilhelmina—one bit——"

Frank, in spite of the tragedy, could not repress a grin.

"I was—just teasing you, and—I shouldn't—have done it—because Mother—told us—you're not—exactly—well yet——"

"Oh, I am, Bob, I *am*! It was something else that made me cranky—nothing that you or anyone did at all——"

"I say, quit it, both of you! You'll be naming the pall bearers before you get through. Haven't we all teased and played tricks ever since we could creep? didn't Jack tie Beth to the back of her chair with the belt of her apron this morning at breakfast? Count your sixty, Willie, and I'll do some yelling to see how near they are." And over his shoulder Frank whispered, "If no one answers, we'll know that Mary has dropped in her tracks, and one of us will have to go in while the other runs for help. This is the worst pickle we *ever* got into."

But Mary had not dropped in her tracks. True,

after the run up the steep hill, she was unable to make much speed over the long, level stretch toward the house; and as her repeated blasts of the whistle brought no response, she realized that those in the house thought the children were using it in a game, and decided to save her breath. Not a soul was in sight. Never had she seen the place so deserted. Suddenly, Fred appeared, racing off toward the barn. A blast of Mary's whistle, a wild waving of her arms, and the little fellow changed his course.

"A rope—a clothes line will do!—Bob!—in the quagmire!"

Fred paled visibly under his deep tan and made for the kitchen porch, Mary following.

"The men—where are they?"

"Abe and Tham and Mothe are in the front thellar ficing the furnathe. I'll get 'em!"

"No, I will! Run with the rope! He's sinking fast!" Mary plunged down the steps to the basement, and Fred was off like an arrow. As he neared the hilltop, he shouted reassuringly in response to Frank's first yell; but his voice died away, and his heart sank when he came in sight of the three, for Bob's head alone was visible. He dashed down the steep slope, waving the rope over his head.

"Tham and Mothe—and Abe will be here—in a thecond—with plankth—the buck up, Bob!"

"Tie one end around my waist and hold on to

Frank. When I get a good hold on Bob, let go of the strap, Frank, and both of you grab the rope; but don't pull until I say so." Wilhelmina kicked off her slippers, and with quick, light steps on the thick, green mass gained the spot behind Bob, when she immediately began to sink. Stooping, she caught the boy firmly under the arms; but instead of raising him, she was dragged down by his weight. Frank and Fred tugged and strained at the rope. "There they are, Bob! right at the top of the hill. I'll hold you all right! Throw your head back and close your mouth tight—that's it. It won't matter if the dirty stuff does get into your ears—it can't go all the way in; but I wouldn't want you to swallow any of it. Here they are with planks! Brace up, Bob! They'll have you out in a minute!"

"We sho' will, Massa Bob, we sho' will! Dat ole green hawg ain't gwine t' git yo' nohow! He! he! he! Wahn't satisfied wif dat poah daid cat I done gib him las' week. He lak a boy fo' a change. But no, *sah!* No boys fo' *yo'* all, yo' ole green hawg! No, *sah!*" And as Sam talked, he arranged the two long planks. "Now, Mose, shove dis yeah one out undah his feet—dat's it. An' den put dis yeah block undah it an' push down easy lak."

"Lower!" gasped Bob.

"He says it's too high. I can feel you pushing

him sideways. Lower, lower!—now—yes, he's coming up a tiny bit!"

"All right, Miss Willie! Easy, Mose, easy! Lemme git out dah now on dis odah plank. Abe, yo's de hebbey weight ob dis yeah crowd. Stand on dis end—yo' alls, too, boys,—so it won't sink when I walks out on it. Now! It's gwine t' be gents befoah ladies dis time, Miss Willie."

Slowly, carefully, Bob was raised, Sam crouching at the end of the plank, holding him as Wilhelmina had done and waiting to grasp the poor, exhausted little body in his strong arms. He might have pulled the boy out, but realized that the weight of the thick, clinging slime would be only an additional strain on the child's already overtaxed muscles. So he waited—waited—then with a quick movement, slipped one arm about Bob's shoulders, the other under his knees, and bore him triumphantly to solid ground. "Dah now! 'Twahn't nuffin' lak de time de poah li'l calf fell in heah. 'Membah, Abe? Dat calf ain't got no sense nohow. He jes nachelly mos' kicked de life out'n us when we wah doin' ouah bes' to git him out. Now, Mose, shove dat plank undah Miss Willie's feet."

Wilhelmina clung to Sam's big, black hands to steady herself, and finally stepped across to the plank on which he stood and hurried along it to Bob's side.

"Now, yo' chilluns mus' tek a li'l res' 'foah yo' sots out to climb dat hill. Yo's all tiahed out.

I'se gwine tote Massa Bob up to de house in double quick time, put him in de baf-tub, an' den in bed. I done tole' Aunt Chloe to hab eberyting ready and telefome fo' de doctah; so yo' ain't got no 'casion to worry, Miss Willie. I reckon he doan' need no doctah, nohow, but it's bettah to mek sho' he ain't got no loose joints or nuffin aftah de haulin' an' draggin' dat ole green hawg done gib him. Help Miss Willie obah de crick, Mose; an', Abe, yo' bettah bring down de ponies an' let dem do de hill climbin'. Doan' yo' fret none, chilluns. Massa Bob's jes' plumb tiahed out —dat's all."

CHAPTER VII

WILHELMINA'S PREDICAMENT

“Mary, I’m desperate!”

Pausing abruptly on the gravel walk leading to the grape arbor, Mary regarded Wilhelmina in astonishment. “Desperate! Here in your own home! I thought it was only at Maryvale with all its rules and bell-ringing and such things that you ever felt that way. And after yesterday—oh, I should think you wouldn’t have room to feel any way but thankful!”

“Thankful? I’m so thankful, Mary, that if I live to be a thousand, it wouldn’t be long enough to tell our Lord how thankful I am. But it’s on account of what happened yesterday that I *am* desperate. I felt worried and puzzled enough before that, goodness knows; but now—”

“Worried and puzzled, Wilhelmina! I didn’t know you *ever* felt that way. What *is* the matter?”

“The matter is that I want to do something, and I don’t know whether I would be breaking my word or not by doing it.”

“Of course you can’t break your word, Wilhelmina. *You* can’t. Some girls could; but you are not that kind. As long as I have known you, you have never done such a thing, and I’m sure you never will. Why, you would have to be made over into someone else before you *could* do it.

Everyone knows that—Sisters, girls, everyone! Sister Austin said to me one day that there isn't a girl in school like you for getting into scrapes, but that you are the *soul of honor!* So if you *would* have to break your word, you may as well stop being desperate right now."

"That's all you know about it!" Wilhelmina looked grim. "You haven't the least idea of what 'desperate' means. Why, you never even get cranky with Berta and Beth no matter what they do. I'd just like to see Dick or Jack take my paints and melt them all in a glass of water as they did yours; or poke the eyes out of a beautiful doll like Amelia Anabelle to see what made her go to sleep. Not that they wouldn't do it in a minute; but they know they would hear something, *I tell you!*"

"But those paints weren't worth anything, Wilhelmina. The little pans were almost empty. And the doll—what is a doll compared to having them? Oh, if you only knew how lonely I was without them all that time when we thought they were dead! It nearly killed me when I came down here the summer before last and saw you all so happy together. Of course, the twins shouldn't break and spoil things; and Mother gave them a scolding about the doll. But when I begin to feel cross with them for some mischief that they have been up to, the thought of them lying so white and still at the very bottom of the ocean,

where we all thought they were, makes me so thankful that they are alive and *able* to get into mischief, that I would let them poke my own eyes out rather than lose them again."

"Of course you would. I feel exactly the same way about the boys and Mary 'Lisbeth. When the boys have broken their bones, and Doctor Blackwell has had to come to set them and find out if there were any other injuries, I have always spent the whole time he was with them just praying my head off and promising not to get cranky when they teased me and all that. But I'm not like you, Mary. When they are well again and up to their old tricks, I flare right up and forget how I felt when I was afraid they might die. I haven't any dolls and things for the little ones to break. I have always had live pets, and the boys are too—too—well, I can't think of the right word, but they never hurt animals. They know it would be cruel. We all play tricks on one another, though, and sometimes there's a grand flare-up all around. But it never lasts long. It isn't such things that are making me desperate, though. Haven't you noticed anything? can't you guess what it is?"

They had entered the arbor and seated themselves on a rustic bench. For some moments, Mary looked thoughtfully at her little friend, every line of whose expressive countenance betrayed the keenest anxiety—an expression so absolutely for-

eign to care-free Wilhelmina that all the elder child's sympathies were aroused.

"I really haven't noticed anything in particular, Wilhelmina. Aren't you feeling well? You seem more quiet—"

"Now you've said it! *Quiet!* Yes, on the outside! But if you could only see what is going on inside! Oh, I knew it couldn't last. No one can dress a wolf up in sheep's clothing and expect it to turn into a truly lamb. I knew there would be an explosion, but I didn't dream that it would be so terrible when it came. Mary, can't you see that everything that happened yesterday was all my fault? I drove Bob into the quagmire by all the ugly, cross, cranky, mean things I said to him before you came out on the porch that time. He was so cut up over it that he didn't see where he was going. Oh, dear, me! Why *was* I such a goose! I didn't know what I was promising. Sometimes, I wonder whether it was a real promise at all. Perhaps it was just a resolution like those I make when I tell Mother Madeline and the Sisters that I will try to behave better. Of course, I always mean to try; but I never succeed very well, and I don't feel that I am breaking my word then. But I'm afraid Father and Mother think this was a promise."

"Why don't you ask them—"

"*Never!* If I have promised, I shall not ask them to let me off."

"Oh, that isn't what I mean, Wilhelmina. Just ask them whether they consider it a promise; and, if they do, you will have to stick to what you said."

"Hm! Suppose I said that I would do something you would like very much; and then, after a few weeks, I should come to you and ask whether you considered I had *promised* to do it—wouldn't you think me a fine one? You would know right well that I was trying to get out of it."

"Of course I would. So would Uncle Phil and Aunt Etta," laughed Mary. "But if you are desperate about it, you must be hoping that there *is* some way out of it."

"I am; and that is why I want your opinion. You have a more sensified way of looking at things than I have. Do you remember what I said to Father and Mother that evening they came to Bird-a-Lea and surprised me? Mother was letting me hold Mary 'Lisbeth, and I was so excited about her and everything else that I hardly knew what I was doing."

"Now, Wilhelmina! You surely don't expect me to remember what you said that evening. I don't know what I said myself."

"Didn't you hear me tell them that I would be more civilized? that while I was the only girl in the family, I thought I might as well act like a boy and be done with it? but that, since I have a little sister, they would see a great change in me?"

"Ye—es, Wilhelmina, you did say all that."

"But I didn't know then that I was coming home for three months. I thought I could begin to practice being civilized at Maryvale, where it isn't quite so hard to be prim and proper. It seems to me that, if I really made a promise, I made it under false offenses, or whatever you call them, and perhaps it doesn't hold good. I certainly made it without 'sufficient reflection,' and I really can't think it was a promise at all. Any-way, look at the awful things that have happened just because I was trying to be proper. And though I told Father and Mother that I was to blame for everything, I know they are puzzled, and I can't explain."

"Well, however you look at it, Wilhelmina, Uncle Phil and Aunt Etta didn't think you made any promise."

"What's that! Father and Mother—Mary, *are you sure?*"

"Perfectly, perfectly sure. Only last night while Mother was brushing my hair, she asked me if I thought you weren't feeling so well. Uncle Phil and Aunt Etta had been talking to her about you, and they can't imagine why you are so quiet and always ready to help sew on buttons and straighten your own room, unless you need a tonic. Uncle Phil said that he thinks some good romps with the boys and a few rides on Dixie or drives in the pony cart would be a better tonic

than anything put up in bottles. Aunt Etta intends to write to Uncle Frank to ask whether you oughtn't to improve faster. You see you are really worrying them by being prim and proper; so they couldn't have considered what you said a promise."

"Hooray!" And with one bound, Wilhelmina was on the seat opposite, executing a Highland Fling that would have completely allayed her parents' anxiety as to the state of her health. Finally she sank on the bench beside Mary. "My! *what* a relief! You have saved me from goodness only knows what, Mary!"

"I wish I had thought last night to ask you what the trouble was. You would have been saved hours of worry."

"W—ell, I can't really say that I have worried about it during the night. I often wonder how people can do such a thing. I go to sleep before I have time. But, Mary," and the expression of utter contentment was suddenly succeeded by one of gravest concern, "what about Mary 'Lisbeth? do you think she is old enough to follow my example? Dear me! It's just dreadful to be a big sister!"

"No, it isn't, Wilhelmina. You will soon get accustomed to it. And I'm quite sure that Mary 'Lisbeth couldn't follow your example in most things even if she would like to."

"Now, Mary, you know very well what I mean.

It would be simply terrible to have that darling angel grow up to be such a harum-scarum as I have always been. Poor Mother has a right to some comfort from at least one of us."

"From the way you talk, Wilhelmina, anyone would think that you had been in the penitentiary. Why, I know that you have never done a mean thing in your whole life. Your mischief never hurts anyone but yourself. You get bad marks at school for not keeping rules better; but when you are wound up, you never think of rules. Boarding school life is much harder for you than it is for most girls. Indeed, I often wish that I could do the things that you do; but I'm too big a coward. Why, I can't even jump the low wall between Bird-a-Lea and Maryvale without falling on top of it and skinning my hands and making big holes in my stockings. And you *are* a comfort to your mother in more ways than you know. She told me last fall that she is so lonely without you while you are away at school that she hopes to keep you at home with her after a year or two. Then it will be my turn to be lonely."

"Hm, you won't be the only one. Not a girl living near here, not even one of my own cousins, no one in the world outside of my very own family can ever be to me what you are. But oh! it would be good not to have to go away from home for ten whole months every year. We shall make long, long visits to each other. You can easily come

here every winter before it is warm enough to go to Cedar Ridge, and I shall go to Bird-a-Lea in the summer time. But about the baby. Do you think she is old enough to remember what I do now, and then try the same things herself when she is able to do them?"

"I really don't know about that, Wilhelmina. She is only four months—"

"That's just what I think about her. Besides, I tried an experiment with her yesterday, and it hasn't had the very least effect on her."

"What was it?"

"Jinny was putting Jack to bed for his nap, and Mother asked me to stay in her room with the baby while she went down to see some callers. I thought it was a good chance to find out if Mary 'Lisbeth notices things. She was lying on Mother's bed, so I took off my shoes and pranced back and forth on the foot-board and waved my arms and made all kinds of faces; but though she was staring right at me, she never so much as winked, and she wasn't a mite crosser last evening nor this morning for all my bad example. No, I can't believe that it will make any difference to her how I behave for about two years. By that time I shall be thirteen, and then I would have to turn over a new leaf, anyway."

CHAPTER VIII

I AM—I DO—WE ARE

While the foregoing consultation was in progress, another of equal importance was taking place between two other little maids seated on the very lowest of the front steps. The emphatic nods of their curly heads gave sufficient evidence of the importance of the matter under discussion. The distant rat-tat-tat of a hammer sounded from the direction of the barns, where Dick was assisting Sam to repair the badly wrecked goat-cart, while Jack, its sole occupant at the time of the accident, was having his injuries attended to by his mother and Mrs. Selwyn. Bob had not fully recovered from the shock and strain of the preceding day; and Frank and Fred were in the schoolroom with Miss Walker. So, for the first time since their arrival at Sunnymead, Berta and Beth found themselves alone.

“Beth, I’se been thinking and thinking,” was the opening announcement.

“You *has*, Berta! And you never did tell me, not ever, ever at all.” There was a world of reproach in Beth’s tone.

“W—w—ell,—b—b—but,—why, you see, honey, nennybody can’t tell what they’s thinking until they’s thought it. So that’s the why I’se going to tell you now.”

“And what has you been thinking, Berta?”

politely inquired Beth, only half mollified, though extremely anxious to satisfy her curiosity.

"I'se been thinking that we's two—great—big—babies!"

"Berta!" gasped Beth, facing about in righteous indignation. "'M, 'm! you know what Mother said about little folkses calling names. 'M, 'm, 'm!"

"But Mother meaned when we called other folkses names—not our own selfs."

"Well, I'se not your own self, and I'se *not* a baby, so now! Mary 'Lisbeth is a baby, and she's a teeny, weeny, little bit of a thing. Why, she hasn't any teeth, and she can't walk or do anything 'cept jes' cry ev'y single time."

"I didn't say *little* babies. I said two—great—'mense—'normous—*big* babies!"

"Berta, it's jes' drefful for you to say such names to me! I know we can't 'spect anybody to think we's *big* folkses; but we's not *babies*! We's *little* folkses. Why, we has *teeth*, Berta, and *hair*, and we can walk and run and dance and talk and sing songs and play the pinanny and 'cite a long, long piece 'bout the night-time before Kismus—"

"*There!* that jes' shows we's *babies*! *Kismus!* Even Dick doesn't say *that*. Ev'ybody says 'Ker-r-r-r-ris-mus.' And nennybody else doesn't say, 'I is,' and 'We is.' They say, 'I *are*,' and 'We *am*.' I'se been listening, so I know. And this morning-time when I was sitting on the side

steps waiting for you, Mother said to Aunt Etta she jes' couldn't misstand the why Dick can say ev'ything right, and we can't. O Beth! she told Aunt Etta how she tried and tried to teach us, but we never did learn 'cept the way Jerry and Tom and Aunt Mandy talk; and you know, honey, they don't talk 'zactly the same as Daddy and Mother; and—and—and I—I jes' know M—M—Mother is 'sh—'sh—'shamed of us!" At which the two threw their arms about each other and mingled their tears in an ocean of woe.

When calm was somewhat restored, Berta tremulously inquired, "Doesn't you think we could possiglee do something to 'prove ourselfs so she won't be, Beth? I 'member a long, long time ago, Mary and Willy-mean and all the big girls and the young ladies wouldn't talk to nennybody at all. Sister Aus'n said it was a 'treat. They went to the Chapel and out in the yard and walked up and down, up and down, saying their beads ev'y single time; but they wouldn't talk to us little folkses not ever, ever at all. It was jes' drefful; but I would try if Mother wouldn't be 'shamed of us nenny more."

"But Mother says it isn't polite not to talk when folkses talk to us."

"But in a 'treat you can't talk; and it must be p'lite then or Sister Aus'n wouldn't let them do it. She's *drefful* p'lite her own self."

"But did anybody talk to the girls?"

"We did; but they jes' went this way." And Berta pressed her finger to her lips and shook her head

"That's easy!" Beth took heart once more, "Ever so much easier than trying to talk big folkses' way. Why, Berta, Father told Mother that he come—plates—a fishy—dishy. In course, I knew what he meant, 'cause I saw him and Uncle Phil fixing fishy rods last evening time, and Freddy and Dick went to dig up worms—ugh! ugly, old, crawly *worms* to catch the fishies with. Yes, I'se quite sure a 'treat would be nicer than 'membering such big words."

"Sh! sh! sh! somebody's coming!" And around the corner of the house raced the two students.

"Here they are!"

"Come on, girlth; don't you want to help uth feed the guinea pigth and all our peth?"

But instead of a joyful assent from their two little guests, the boys were astonished to receive only mournful negative shakes of the head.

"They're playing they're deaf and dumb."

"Perhapth they're weak. They didn't theem to eat much breakfath."

"Are you hungry? would you like some cookies and milk?"

Again the heads shook a sorrowful "no."

"Oh, I say, what's the matter? You look as if you were going to a funeral. Did you get hurt when the cart broke down?"

"That mutht be jutht what happened. They bumped their headth tho hard that it shook all the voith out of them."

"Then we had better tell Mother right away so she can send for Doctor Blackwell." And the boys scampered back the way they had come.

"Run!" gasped Berta, grasping Beth's hand.

"Way down to the arbor!" insisted Beth.

Away fled the two between the rows of shrubbery bordering the narrow path.

As they neared the arbor, Mary and Wilhelmina emerged from it and paused at sight of the evident distress of the little ones.

"Hide us! Hide us!" they cried frantically, flinging themselves upon the older children and dragging them back into the arbor.

"There, there, don't be afraid! There is nothing chasing you now."

"O Willy-mean!—we—has—such—a drefful—trouble," panted Berta.

"Such a—dr—drefful, dref-ful trouble," echoed Beth between sobs.

"Have the boys been teasing you?" Wilhelmina's eyes flashed with indignation.

"No, no, no, Willy-mean," protested Berta mournfully. "It's jes' a trouble in our own selfs."

"Sit down and tell us all about it," coaxed Mary.

The twins exchanged glances; then Berta murmured almost inaudibly, "Mother is 'shamed of us.'"

"Dear, dear, haven't you been playing nicely with Dick and Jack?"

"Yes, Mary, we's been playing most nicely; but Billy wasn't. He kicked up his heels and ran away and bumped into a tree and broke the pretty cart; and we tooked Jack to Aunt Etta and Mother to get hisself mended up. But that isn't the why Mother is 'shamed of us.'" And the dark head drooped pathetically.

"I don't see how she *can* be ashamed of you," insisted Wilhelmina. "Since you've been here, you've been the best little girls in the world. Ashamed of you! The very idea! I don't believe it. What was chasing you just now?"

"Nennything wasn't chasing us, Willy-mean. We—we ran away 'cause—'cause the doctor is coming."

"The doctor, Berta! Oh, is Jack much hurt?"

"Not very much, Willy-mean. The doctor is—is coming to see us."

"To see *you!*" Mary's eyes opened wide.

"Ye—es, Mary, 'cause we's in a 'treat, and Frank and Freddie thinked we couldn't talk,'" explained Beth.

"You mean that you are playing you're in Retreat?" Wilhelmina's eyes danced. "Well, that is a joke!"

"But we isn't joking, Willy-mean; we's earning," protested Berta.

"Hm! I think you had better wait until you

leave Sunnymead before you try to make a Retreat. The boys won't give you a chance to make one here, that's certain."

"But we jes' *has* to do something, Willy-mean; and a 'treat is so much easier than trying to talk like big folkses.'" Beth's under lip quivered pitifully.

"But no one expects you to talk as grown people do." Light had been slowly dawning upon Mary. "Why, Wilhelmina and I can't do that, and we are ever so much older than you are."

"We's nearly hap-past four, and Berta said we's great, big, 'mense, 'normous babies, so she did!"

"And that's 'zactly what we is—no, *am*. I is—no, *are* going to talk right, and I aren't going to make a 'treat, either; so now!"

This was too much for Wilhelmina. "O duckies, you *is*, *am*, *are* too funny!"

"B—but Mother's 'shamed of us, and—and the why is 'cause—we talk like b—b—babies!" And Berta wailed dismally.

"Well, Mother won't be ashamed of you very long." Mary was all sympathy. "Every morning we shall come down here and play school."

"Yes, we shall begin right now. Mary will be the teacher, and I'm the bad girl who never studies her lessons, and you are both good girls who always go to the head of the class. We three shall sit on this bench, and that one will be the teacher's seat."

The little ones dried their tears and entered eagerly into the plan, Beth insisting, "You be head of the class first, Willy-mean, 'cause you is —no, *am* the biggest."

"Well, I won't be there long, Beth, with such good children as you and Berta in the class."

"Now, I shall ask questions, and you must answer them; and when one makes a mistake, the next one must give the right answer and go above her. Wilhelmina, are you a good girl?"

"I should say I *is!*"

"*I are!*" Berta triumphantly prepared to go head.

"*I—I—I does!*" Beth sprang to her feet.

"Everyone is wrong. Your turn again, Wilhelmina."

"*I—I am!*"

"Correct. Now, Berta, do you study your lessons?"

"*I am!*" was the complacent reply.

"Oh! oh! *I does!* I can go ahead of you, Berta."

"No, no, Bethy, you made a mistake. Wilhelmina?"

"*I—I doos!*"

"*I do!*" Berta proudly took first place.

"Beth's turn. Are we going for a drive today?"

"*We am!*" The little maid remembered Berta's lesson of a half hour earlier.

"*We is!*"

"We—we—did yesterday," hazarded Wilhelmina.

"*We are!*" And Beth went head with a happy little skip.

"Now, young ladies, we shall proceed to exercise our memories on these three expressions only, until you have thoroughly grasped their significance—"

"Then we isn't—we amn't—no, we *are not* coming to this old school nenny more! You said we doesn't—no, we *do* not have to say big words, and now you 'spect us to misstand when you talk about 'ceeds and 'pressions and signy fignies and all things same as that. Come on, Beth, we'll make a 'treat.'"

"But—but Mary doesn't 'spect us to say signy fignies and all those things, Berta. She's be-tending to be a big folks. We must jes' say, '*I am,*' and '*I do,*' and '*We are,*' ev'y time she asks us."

Notwithstanding the unpromising beginning, the little class assembled every morning; and, strange to relate, in spite of their mother's surprise and delight at their steadily improving conversation, the twins kept the secret.

To Mary and Wilhelmina, the half hour from nine to half past every morning was a time of real amusement; but to the two little ones, it was the most important period of the day. It was not unusual for them to slip away to the arbor immediately after breakfast, and there put to each

other the questions asked on the previous morning; nor was it of rare occurrence that the arrival of the two older girls interrupted a decidedly heated argument. Indeed, on one occasion, they found the little pupils seated as far apart as the length of the arbor would permit—Berta, grim and determined; Beth in tears, but equally determined. Then Mary, with the utmost dignity, declared that if private lessons had such a bad effect on the pupils, the school had better be closed; and arm in arm, she and Wilhelmina sauntered down the walk toward the garden, leaving the twins overcome with remorse. In feverish haste they kissed and made up, and timidly followed the two older girls.

“M—M—Ma—ry, W—Wil—ly—me—un” Berta at length ventured.

“Well?” Mary turned partly around; but Wilhelmina could not trust herself to follow suit.

“D—does you—*do* you think you can possiglee ‘scuse us jes’ this once if we promise ‘Fai’ful, true, honest Injun, black and blue’? I’se—no, I *am* quite sure Beth said it krectly.”

“Oh, no, Berta, I jes’ know *you* did.”

“Said what correctly?”

“I said I couldn’t *misstand* what Uncle Phil meanted at breakfus when he was talking to Daddy; and Beth thoughted—th—thought I ought to say ‘*instand*;’ and first I thoughted—thought Beth didn’t say it krectly, but now I’m *quite* sure she *did*.”

Wilhelmina retired behind a convenient bush.

"Well, Berta, you know by experience that Beth is usually right—not always, of course—"

"Ye—s, Mary, I know she has a better 'mem—bering thing in her head than I has—*have*."

"No, I think she is just a little more careful than you are and stops to think before she speaks. But this time it happens that both of you are wrong."

The two looked at each other and gasped. "Oh! oh! isn't that piffeckly *drefful*!"

"Not a bit." Mary edged away from the bush. "But it *is* perfectly dreadful for two little girls to be so stubborn and to make each other unhappy, especially after all the beautiful things Mother has told you about Blessed Mother when she was a little girl." Mary paused to give her words time to take effect; then continued cheerfully, "But since you are really sorry, we shall open the school again. Run back to the arbor and get ready, and we shall be there in a few minutes."

Hand in hand, the twins skipped away, and Wilhelmina came from behind the bush.

"We shall have to take 'the longest way round' to get back to that arbor, Mary. It's my turn to-day to be teacher; but I simply can't face those two. You will have to do it; and *please* ask some foolish question so they will think I have reason for laughing."

CHAPTER IX

THREE BEWILDERED BOYS

When class was over and the two little ones had run off to find the boys, Wilhelmina astonished Mary by asking, "Why don't you write a story about those two?"

"Write a story, Wilhelmina!"

"Oh, you needn't look like that. I mean it. It would be a hundred times easier for you to write about the things they do and say than it is to make up stories by the yard about other children, the way you often do to amuse the twins."

"But telling a story is a very different thing from writing one, Wilhelmina. Only authors write stories, you know."

"And what were authors once upon a time? weren't they boys and girls like us? and didn't they have to make a beginning some time or other before they were able to write stories and verses that were fit to read? Look at Uncle Dave, one of Mother's brothers. I suppose he's an author. He gets out a magazine every month and writes for it and for other papers, too; but Mother says when he was my age he just hated to write compositions and letters. I guess I take after him, specially in spelling. Mother says he was a caution. But he is a great comfort to me, Mary; for when Father teases me about the kind of letters

I write, Mother always says, ‘Never mind. Remember what Dave was at her age, Father.’ ”

“Then you see, Wilhelmina, he didn’t begin to write until he was older. Why, authors have to know how to spell all kinds of words and where to put commas and semicolons and all such things—”

“Hm! I guess you needn’t worry about spelling when you could write the kind of letters you did from Europe and put in all those French and Italian and German and Swiss and Dutch names. Oh, I was always so happy when those letters came even though it made me feel like a cancelled postage stamp when Father looked over his spectacles at me and said, ‘When may we expect to receive such a well-written letter from you, little daughter?’ ”

“But Uncle Phil knew right well that I couldn’t have spelled those words without help from Mother and Uncle Frank. And authors can’t have their mothers and uncles sitting beside them to tell them how to spell.”

“You can find millions of words in the dictionary, Mary; though, if I were you, I would use only words that I was sure of and save myself the trouble of looking them up. As for those other things, you know enough to put a period or a question mark at the end of a sentence, and you can sprinkle the commas in here and there wherever you think they look best; and when you aren’t sure whether to use a colon or a semicolon, just

put in a dash. Dashes are such comfortable things. They seem to fit anywhere."

"O Wilhelmina, Wilhelmina!" Mary threw back her head and laughed gaily. "You know very well that you can't sprinkle commas around where they look best. Those marks are used to make the sense clear to the reader."

"Then say what you mean plainly in words and leave out all those things. It will be as easy as anything."

"Since you think it will be so easy, why don't you write the story?"

"I write a story! Well, Mary, I thought you had more sense. But I'll tell you what I *shall* do. If you write the story, I shall draw pictures for it. You are always telling me I have talent for drawing, so here is a chance to prove it. Of course, I don't mean for you to write a story that will be printed in a book; but just one that only we two shall ever see. And when we are old, old ladies with false frizzes and store teeth and spectacles, you will come here to visit me, and I shall go to Bird-a-Lea to visit you, and we shall sit in rocking-chairs on the porch with our cups of tea and our tabby cats and our knitting or tatting or whatever it will be the style then for old ladies to do; and we shall take turns reading the story aloud. O Mary, it will be great fun!" And Wilhelmina tossed back the short thick curls which had fallen about her flushed, eager, little face.

Mary could not imagine the day, however distant, when her little friend would be obliged to part with either that mop of dark curls or those strong white teeth and replace them by the artificial variety; nor could she picture herself without her own heavy fair hair hanging below her waist. But she realized that she and Wilhelmina would have many a good time over the book, and consented to make an attempt to write the story.

"We shall ride into town this afternoon to get what we need, Mary. I think one of those stiff-covered composition books will be just the thing for you to write in, and I shall get drawing paper the same size. Then you can leave vacant pages here and there, and we shall paste the pictures on them."

"I had better write first on pencil paper and copy it in the book, Wilhelmina; because there may be parts of the story that will need changing."

"Any way you please, just so you do it. And we won't breathe a word about it to a living soul."

It was as much as Wilhelmina could do to keep the secret during luncheon; and when she announced with an air of mystery that she and Mary were going to town immediately after that meal, the curiosity of the three older boys was at once aroused.

"Let's go see about having our ball glove mended, Bob."

"But we are not going to take the cart," pro-

tested Wilhelmina ; "we're going to ride."

"Well, I guess we have our ponies, haven't we? And Frank didn't say that we're going with you."

"No, he didn't *say* it; but just the same, you're going only to snoop around and see what we buy. You had no idea of going to town this afternoon until I said Mary and I are going. Father, don't let them. We have a secret—"

"Oho! as if Bob and I don't know why you two were out in the kitchen first thing this morning! They had all Aunt Chloe's cook books open at once. I bid for the chocolate pan, um! um! um!" And Frank patted himself in anticipation of the treat.

"There are not going to be any pans in this secret. There's not one bit of use making candy around here. It's all eaten before it's half made. At Bird-a-Lea when Mary and I make candy, Berta and Beth are satisfied to scrape the pans and then wait until the candy is hard."

"They don't appreciate your cooking as much as we do; eh, Bob?"

"You're right, Frank. Besides, we like things fresh."

"Well, this secret has no candy in it. It's something that's going to last until Mary and I are old, old ladies—"

"Then don't athk uth to eat any of it. I don't 'prethiate thtale cake."

"It isn't cake either, Fred. It isn't anything to

eat, and really it doesn't make a bit of difference whether you see what we buy or not. You can never, never guess what we are going to do with the things; can they, Mary?"

"I'm perfectly sure they can't, Wilhelmina. No one but you would ever think of such a thing for us to do."

Immediately after luncheon the girls were off, with Frank, Bob, and Freddie not far behind.

"We shall go to every store in town, Mary, and price all sorts of foolish things; and the boys will be so puzzled that when we go to that school supply place next to the public school to buy what we really want, they won't think such things belong to our secret at all. Just wait!"

The two girls dismounted in front of the general store of the little town, and with the boys at their heels, entered and went straight to the proprietor, who had known the Marvin children all their lives.

"We are going around to a good many departments to-day, Mr. Loring, and we would be glad to have the same clerk show us the things if you have one who is not too busy."

"This is not our busy time of day, Miss Marvin—"

Bob promptly fell over against his twin. "*Did you hear that, Frank! Miss Marvin!* And she's swallowing it whole without a gulp, and she's not even two whole years older than we are!"

But Mr. Loring was still speaking. "And I shall be delighted to accompany you myself. What is the first thing you would like to see?"

"I suppose we had better look at the trunks first; don't you think so, Mary?"

The boys opened their eyes, and when they reached the trunk department, listened in amazement while their sister glibly priced steamer trunks, suitcases, and valises. Mr. Loring obligingly brought out a catalog, offering to send to Macon or Savannah for anything he did not have in stock. As Wilhelmina bent her head over the pages, she managed to whisper a word of explanation to the old man, who entered heartily into the fun. Before the two girls had finished discussing the advantages and disadvantages of traveling with much luggage, the boys had withdrawn to some little distance. Frank solved the problem to the entire satisfaction of the other two—at least, for the time being. "I know! I bet Uncle Rob and Aunt 'Lisbeth and all of them are going on down to Florida and then across to Cuba, and they've invited Willie to go with them. Gee whillikins! I wish I was in her boots!"

"Don't I though!"

"Theemth to me ith about time thomebody came along and athed uth to go thomewhere."

"Haven't we just been somewhere? We certainly didn't expect to go to Bird-a-Lea for Christmas—"

"Great Caesar!" Bob's black eyes almost popped out of his head as he saw the smiling proprietor set aside a handsome Russian leather valise and heard him say, "Yes, Miss Marvin, I can easily have them here by Thursday—that is, if they have them on hand at the factory. Perhaps you had better mark your second choice in the catalog; for the trunk and suitcase you prefer are both very popular styles and the factory may be out of them for the time being. And what can I show you now?"

"Washing machines," was the prompt reply.

"Very good! very good! I have just received a shipment of electric washers, the latest and best on the market." The old man beamed on the boys as he passed them on his way to the laundry supply department.

"Huh! Doesn't sound much like Cuba, Frank." Mary and Wilhelmina caught the whispered remark and were glad that they were in front of the boys.

"I gueth I know what ith up. Willie ith going to Thedar Ridge with 'em, and Fawthah thayth it ith an old-fashioned plathe, and of courth they wouldn't have electric washerth there, tho they're going to take one with 'em."

"But if it's so old-fashioned, have they the electricity to run the washer?" Frank asked anxiously. "Willie ought to think of that. Tell her, Fred."

"*I will not! Tell her your own shelf.*"

"But if the washer is for Cedar Ridge, why isn't Mary doing the buying?" demanded Bob.

"Perhaps Mothah ith making Aunt 'Lithabeth a prethent of it."

"Then why doesn't Mother do the buying? What does Sis know about washing machines, anyway? I'll bet she has never seen ours working. You and I could give her some pointers, Bob. For instance, I wouldn't buy a washer with that—'" Frank paused to listen to Mr. Loring.

"You think these are too large, Miss Marvin? I thought for a family the size of yours—Oh, it is *not* for your family. For your friend's perhaps. No? Well, let me take a look at that catalog and see whether this style washer is made in a smaller size. Electric washers—page—one twenty-six—There you are! Yes, here is probably the size you wish,—size three..... Trouble? Not at all, Miss Marvin, not at all! But I am afraid I cannot have it here before Saturday."

"Oh, that will do nicely, Mr. Loring. And now let me see." Wilhelmina consulted a slip of paper, which, by the way, she had torn from a page of the catalog. But the boys were not near enough to see that it was printed, not merely written on.

"If it wasn't that Willie isn't even two whole years older than we are, I'd say she's going to get married." At which loudly whispered comment from Bob, the two girls turned abruptly to take

another look at the washer. When Wilhelmina felt that she could safely speak, she asked, "Do you keep horse blankets, Mr. Loring?"

The boys gasped and stared at one another.

"Sorry, Miss Marvin, but that is one thing I do not carry in stock; but I can easily send down the street to the harness shop and have an assortment here by the time you have finished your other shopping."

"No, no, Mr. Loring, thank you. We can stop there on our way home. Oh, I see you have bird cages. How large a one do you think it will need, Mary?"

Bird cages! Wilhelmina, who thought every living thing should be as free as air, buying a bird cage! The boys were almost stupefied. Freddie alone ventured a remark. "Willie hath thertainly changed thince the fire."

Again Mr. Loring spoke. "Lace bed spreads? To be sure, Miss Marvin. I have something that I think will suit your taste exactly." Chuckling and rubbing his hands, the old man led the way to the far end of the store, where, against a background of turkey red cambric, hung a large spread with pillow shams to match. Wilhelmina and Mary almost screamed; for the design showed Robinson Crusoe seated under a palm tree with Friday at his feet. But they managed after a few moments during which they stood gazing raptur-

ously at the set, to assure Mr. Loring that it was “just the thing!”

The boys sank weakly on a pile of comforters. A traveling outfit, an electric washer, a horse blanket, a bird cage, a lace spread—and such a spread! Words failed even loquacious Freddie. But the three sprang to their feet as though a shot had been fired behind them when they heard their sister calmly inquire, “Mr. Loring, do you know whether they keep electric coupés at that new automobile place up the street? or do they just have touring cars and such things?”

The puzzled expression on Fred’s serious little face gave place to one of genuine alarm. “Thay, boyth, let’th go home. Willie hath gone crathy, and Fawthah ought to know it and come and make her thtop thith:” He started down the aisle, but paused at Bob’s “Hold on, Fred! Mary doesn’t seem to think she’s crazy. She’s letting Sis buy anything she pleases; and we all know Mary has sense.”

“But—but perhapth it’th contagiouth, and Mary hath caught it thame ath you catch meathleth and chicken poeth and thcarlet fever and all thuch thingth. They’re alwayth together, and Mary’th room ith right neeth to Thith’th, and they leave the door between open at night. I heard Thith thay tho.”

“W—ell, wait a few minutes, anyway.” Frank was determined to solve the mystery. “She’s

bound to buy something that will let the cat out of the bag, and then we can scoot along home, and Father can 'phone to tell Mr. Loring not to pay any attention to what she has done. She hasn't paid a cent for anything, so she must be charging them to Father. Whew! won't he be mad though? I wouldn't want to be in her boots after all, eh, Bob?"

"But even if Willie paid for the things, Mr. Loring would give the money back."

"Ye—es, I s'pose he would. Say, that fire had an awful effect on Willie, didn't it? Until this afternoon, she has seemed all right since the day you almost went down in the quagmire. That was about the most natural thing we did after we came home, and I s'pose it brought her to her senses. I'm going to give Mr. Loring a tip before we leave here."

Though the boys thought they were conversing in whispers, nothing they said escaped the girls. Wilhelmina was jubilant. "We've got them just where we want them, Mary. Tell me some other wild thing to look at, and they'll trot along home and leave us in peace. I really can't believe that they would be able to guess about the book from the paper and things that we buy, but that would be the very reason they would come snooping around while we are working on the story."

Mary thought for a moment and then suggested going into the grocery department. There Wil-

helmina's eyes fell upon the large scales, and she immediately asked the price..

"These, of course, are not for sale, Miss Marvin; but I can order the same kind for you. Let us see what the catalog has to say about the price. I cannot remember what I paid for these."

"Say, Frank, I'm going to buy some peanuts to save the looks of things. Willie is putting him to no end of trouble, and he's not going to get a cent for it after all."

"Yes, wouldn't you think they'd buy some cookies or something? The old tight wads! The clerks will think the Marvins are a nice bunch. I'm certainly surprised at Mary, but I s'pose she doesn't like to hurt Willie's feelings. Come on. How much have you got? Jiminy! I hate to spend every cent I have with me when I'm saving for a new tennis racket. But a fellow's got to think of his family and not let it be disgraced this way." And while Wilhelmina and Mary racked their brains for something even more ridiculous than the articles already mentioned, the three boys spent every dime, nickle, and penny in their pockets for peanuts and candy. They were somewhat cheered by Fred's suggestion, "Perhapth Fawthah 'll pay uth back, 'cauth we're thaving the reputation of the family. He'll thertainly 'prethiate it."

Out on the sidewalk, Wilhelmina paused. "That new auto place is just up at the next corner, Mary.

We may as well walk there. The ponies will be all right here until we come back."

Bob could stand it no longer. "Oh, I say, Sis, come along home. Father won't like it if you go rooting around into all the new places in town."

Wilhelmina assumed an air of injured dignity. "Really, Bob, I think Father knows that he can trust me." And as the two girls turned away, Frank darted back into the store to Mr. Loring. He was out again in a moment. "Now, we've got to ride for it. Bad enough to have that poor old fellow wasting all this time. I wish you could have seen his face when I gave him a hint of what's wrong. But it's a million times worse to think of her going into a new place run by strangers." He sprang into his saddle, and the three were off at top speed.

"Mary's the one I can't understand, unless Freddie is right about a thing like that being contagious. Heavens, Frank! If you ever see me do anything queer, hold me under the pump until I come to my senses, will you? A steamer trunk and a washing machine; a horse blanket and a bird cage; a lace bed spread and an electric coupé! What in the name of goodness does she think she's going to do with them?"

CHAPTER X

TWO TRIUMPHANT GIRLS

If the boys had turned in their saddles and caught sight of Wilhelmina clapping her hands and dancing about on the sidewalk, their anxiety would have doubled.

Back to their ponies the two girls ran, and a few minutes later they were in the little school supply shop. It took some time to select their materials, and they had almost decided on a large, leather-covered, gilt-edged composition book, when Mary's eye fell on a loose leaf note book.

"See this, Wilhelmina! It is just the thing. If I spoil a page, I needn't put it in, but just write it over again on another sheet; and here is the drawing paper exactly the same size with holes already punched in it. That will save pasting your pictures on the pages."

Wilhelmina readily agreed and then selected a number of pencils and various kinds of erasers. At last the purchases were wrapped and paid for, and after an ice cream soda at the corner drug store, the two little girls mounted their ponies and started for home.

"Do you think we shall meet Uncle Phil coming to see what ails us, Wilhelmina?"

"Indeed not, Mary. Father knows me by heart. He will understand that I have just been trying to give the boys the slip, but he won't pretend so

to them. He will look very solemn while they are telling him their worries about us; but after they have gone, simply bursting with their own importance, he will find Mother, and they will both have the best laugh ever was. Wait until Mother hears about the present she was supposed to be giving Aunt 'Lisbeth!'" Wilhelmina's merry laugh caused the people on the street to smile.

"And that awful spread! Does anyone ever buy such things, Wilhelmina?"

"Of course they do. Why, a darkey bride would think that set a scrumptious wedding gift, and there are plenty of white folks, too, who would be glad to get it. But poor Mr. Loring had a time keeping his face straight when he showed it to us. No wonder the boys thought I had gone crazy. They know that I have always made fun of such things. And the poor fellows spent every cent they had to save the reputation of the family." Again Wilhelmina laughed gaily. "Well, it just serves them right for being so snoopy. Really, Mary, you ought to have a pretty good idea now what it means to keep a secret in our family. Berta and Beth may be curious to know what is going on, but they're not old enough to plan so many ways of finding out. I wonder just where will be the best place for us to work on the book. Perhaps in the arbor when the twinnies have finished their lesson and gone off to play. They never

do come back again, and the boys have never bothered us there."

"I am not thinking so much about where we are going to *work* on the book as where I am to begin my story."

"Why, on the first page of the composition book, of course. Oh, that's so: you didn't buy a book. Well, then, on the first sheet of your tablet. No, not on the first one, either. There is always a blank page left in the front of a book; then comes a picture; and facing it is a page with the name of the story on it. What are you going to call it, Mary?"

"Oh, dear, me, Wilhelmina! I haven't thought of a name for it yet. I don't even know what I am going to say on the very first page."

"'Berta and Beth' wouldn't be a bad name. Still, there's time enough to decide about that. But let's pretend that's the name until we plan the page facing the first picture. It ought to go like this: 'Berta and Beth, by Mary Selwyn'—that is, if you are going to use your own name. Some writers don't, you know. Father told me that 'Mark Twain,' for instance, isn't the man's real name at all. It's his—oh, I don't know what you call it. Some Frenchy name that ends with feather—no, *plume*. But it doesn't make much difference, I guess. In plain English it means pen name. So are you going to have a pen name or just use your own?"

"You make me laugh, Wilhelmina. You talk as if I were a real author. Of course I shall use my own name if I have to use any at all. I really don't see why a name is needed. You will know that I have written the story, and I shall know that you have drawn the pictures; and we are the only ones who are ever to see the book."

"But we must make it sound like a truly book, Mary. So that first page will go like this: 'Berta and Beth by Mary Selwyn, author of—'"

"Now, Wilhelmina, that's *too* much! I'm not an author of *anything*. I have never written a thing in all my life."

"Why, Mary, you have *too!* You've written letters from Europe—oh, I have it! That sounds as much like the name of a book as ever so many in the library. And if all your letters were made into one book, it would be a million times more interesting than some of the books of letters that I have seen. Jöggerfy seems to me to have more sense since I have read those letters written by someone I know so well. So we shall say, 'Author of Letters from Europe and'—let—me—see. What else have you written?'"

"Wilhelmina, I think you're just terrible!"

"I'm not, either. 'Letters from Europe and'—I know! 'A Hundred and One Compositions,' no, 'Essays'—"

"Wilhelmina!"

"Yes, that sounds scrumptious! Maybe you

have written only ninety-nine or a hundred compositions—I'm sure I've written as many as that—but the extra *one* gives a more highfalutin' sound to the name. Anyway, what difference does it make what we say you have written when no one else is going to see it. We can pretend that you are a really, truly author, can't we, and put down the names of dozens of books? But I think just those two and 'et cetera' will make it sound important enough. Let's see. 'Berta and Beth by Mary Selwyn, author of Letters from Europe, One Hundred and One Essays, et cetera. Illustrated by Wilhelmina Marvin.'" I shall just use my own name, too. Artists don't have feather names—I mean pen names. Now, that fixes the first page. Then comes the contents page, doesn't it? and then the list of illustrations; and then the story begins."

"But where shall I begin it?"

Wilhelmina swung around in her saddle. "Mary, what's the matter with you? haven't I just told you where to begin it?"

"Oh, that's not what I mean, Wilhelmina. Do you expect me to tell all about the twinnies since they were teeny, weeny babies?"

"W—ell,—I don't know about that. There really isn't much to tell about such *little* babies. Mary 'Lisbeth doesn't do anything but sleep and wake up and cry and laugh a little once in a while. And Berta and Beth were away from you so long

just when they began to do cute things. I think the best place to begin the story will be just after you moved out to Bird-a-Lea last September. The things they have done since are still fresh in your mind, and it will be easier to write about them. You can begin with the afternoon you and I hurried to the village to meet your father and then drove back to Bird-a-Lea in the new cart. Will you ever forget the look on their faces when they saw what Uncle Rob had bought for them instead of the goat cart they were so anxious to have? A 'billy cart,' as they called it."

"Yes, and how much afraid they were of Hercules when he jumped off the back seat of it and bounded up the steps."

"And you can tell about the day Berta fell out of the peach tree. That will make a fine picture if I can get it right. I can't hang her by her dress to a broken branch as she hung that day, so I shall have to make it up."

"And do you think you can draw them at the table as they looked that Saturday afternoon at the little surprise party we had for them when the big play room was finished?"

"Too many in that for a picture, Mary. But you can tell about it. Oh, you will find more than enough to write about them. What they have done down here would fill a book."

Recalling the various antics of the Selwyn twins, the girls found the homeward ride all too

short. As they neared the gates at Sunnymead, they caught sight of the three boys awaiting their arrival.

"Mary, look at them! They are surely keeping an eye on me!"

"On me, too, for fear I have caught the disease."

"But do you know what it means? They will tag around after us everywhere we go, and we won't be able to do a thing on our book."

"Perhaps if you do a few of the things they think are *natural*, as they called Bob's terrible time in the swamp, they will believe you are all right again and let us alone."

"Oh, if I just hadn't promised Mother not to do it, I would ride standing up in the saddle all the way to the house. Never mind, I can do a few things as it is." And with a perfectly *natural* whoop, Wilhelmina dashed through the gates, snatched off the boys' caps in quick succession, and on her way up the drive performed various other feats which more than satisfied her anxious brothers that the spell had passed.

Day after day during the remainder of her visit, for an hour or so after class had been dismissed, Mary wrote at the little rustic table in the arbor, while Wilhelmina sat opposite, touching up the rough sketches she had made the day before. She had decided talent for drawing—a fact which her parents recognized; and they fully intended

to allow her to develop it later on. It was the one quiet occupation in which the child felt perfectly happy; and her brothers were so accustomed to being asked to "stand that way just a minute until I get you," that they ran away whenever they saw her approaching with paper and pencil. By means of bribes of candy and ice cream soda, she still succeeded in coaxing Dick and Jack to pose for her; so the curiosity of the other three boys was not aroused when they saw Berta and Beth acting as models. And the two little girls were delighted to have their "Willy-mean make" their pictures. Seated on the steps with Mary on one side of her and one of the twins on the other, Wilhelmina drew with quick bold strokes whichever of the little ones happened to be posing, until the one beside her cried, "Oh, come, come see what Willy-mean's making you do now!" And Mary's, "No, no, stay where you are!" had no effect on the child, whose curiosity had to be satisfied before she could be persuaded to resume her pose. When Wilhelmina had finished her rough sketches of them, they would insist on her standing before them while they "made" her picture.

At last came a letter from Mr. Clyde, the overseer at Cedar Ridge, announcing that the weather seemed fairly well settled in that locality.

"Oh, dear, Mary! and the story isn't half finished. I had hoped it would be ended before you

would have to go away. Now, I can't do the rest of the pictures for the book."

"But I can tell you what I am going to write, Wilhelmina; or better still, I shall send you a copy of each chapter as soon as I have it finished, and you can make the drawings and mail them to me."

"Scrumptious, Mary! I know that I shall have to get down to work with Miss Walker the very day after you leave here; but I shall manage to find time to draw the pictures. Of course, I shall have to make them up, and that won't be so easy as having the twins here to pose for me; but I have drawn them in so many positions that I think I can manage pretty well."

"Of course you can, Wilhelmina. The pictures that you have finished are just wonderful. I think you really ought to show them to your father and mother. They would surely let you begin to take lessons; and they wouldn't guess about our secret, either, because you are always doing pictures of the boys. Come, let us take these to them this minute, and I shall help you ask about the lessons."

CHAPTER XI

A ROYAL WELCOME

“Can we see it from the train, Father?”

“We should be able to catch a glimpse of the old place, Mary, if the town has not built out this way and run up too many skyscrapers. After we have left this strip of woodland behind us, I shall point it out to you. Meanwhile, we had better put on our wraps.”

“Oh, are we almost at Daddy’s house where he lived when he was a little boy, a long, long, long time ago?” And while her mother fastened her coat, Berta wriggled about excitedly to obtain a better view out the window.

“Almost there,” replied her father. “Come in here by me and see whether those sharp eyes of yours cannot spy it first. Room for you, too, Beth.”

As the three children watched impatiently for the end of the woods, Mrs. Selwyn resumed her seat at her husband’s side, fully realizing what this first glimpse of the old home meant to him who had broken all family ties for his Faith.

“Oh, see the cute little river!” cried Beth.

“That stream forms the southern boundary of our place. Many a morning my brother and I spent fishing in it.”

Then the woods ended suddenly, and a low plain stretched away between them and a high steep hill in the distance.

"Now, now, Father! Where shall we look?"

"On the top of that elevation before us, Mary. The house is not yet in sight."

"They's only trees and trees, 'way, 'way up on a big hill," complained Berta.

"Just a moment, pet. Ah! there it is at last! Can you see it now—among the trees on the very top of the ridge?"

"I see something white, Father; but I thought you said the house is red."

"So it is, Mary. You see the columns supporting the roof of the veranda across the front."

"I see white, too!" "I see it!" insisted the twins, gazing in any but the right direction.

"And is it built on the top of a mountain, Father?"

"No, indeed, Mary. The hill before you is merely the eastern end of the ridge, which drops abruptly to this plain. The southern side of the ridge slopes none too gently to the little stream which we crossed a few minutes ago; but the incline on the north is very slight, as you will see in a moment. The eastern and southern slopes and the top of the ridge for some miles back of the house are well wooded. The fields and pastures lie to the north and northwest."

"And is Cedar Ridge the name of the whole ridge, or of just our part of it?"

"Only our own place is called by that name, owing to the great number of cedars growing on

this end of the rise—just as Bird-a-Lea was named by Mr. Elliot for his special pets, and Wilhelmina's home—well, really, I do not know why Phil Marvin's place is called Sunnymead. Beyond a doubt, the sun shines with equal splendor on the meadows of his neighbors."

"Do we stay on the train until we reach the town, Father, or is there a little station this side of it?"

"There is no stop nearer than the town. We shall drive back these two miles over which we are now traveling."

"And will we have to climb that drefful, 'nor-mous, 'mense, big, high hill, Daddy?"

"Not at all, Berta. It would be a difficult matter to construct a road up the face of that precipice. The entrance to our grounds is off here at the northeast corner. It is nearly a half mile from the main road and is connected with it by a private driveway made by our great-uncle of many generations back,—the same one who built the house."

"Is it very much farther to the station, Father? I am so anxious to get into the carriage and drive along that beautiful road; for I know it must be beautiful when everything else over that way is. Oh, we are beginning to go slower, and I hear music—"

"And here we are!" Mr. Selwyn rose. "But where did the crowd come from? And see the

decorations! What event are they celebrating today?"

"The arrival of someone of whom they evidently think a great deal." Mrs. Selwyn laughed softly, a sweet, proud expression in her beautiful eyes, which rested for a moment on the platform packed with men, women, and flower-laden children, all in holiday attire, then on the little station decked with flags, bunting, and more flowers, while the village band blared the triumphant strains of *Hail the Conquering Hero Comes.* Then she turned to follow her husband and the little ones down the aisle.

The mighty cheer which greeted his appearance in the doorway made Mr. Selwyn aware of the reason for the demonstration. For a moment he paused, touched beyond measure at what was plainly an overwhelming desire to make amends for the lack of welcome at his homecoming thirteen years before. Not that he had at that time any more than at present expected such an ovation. He would have been as much surprised then as now that more than a very few knew of his coming. But the people themselves had evidently resented the fact that his sister had kept them in ignorance of his intention to visit the old home on his wedding trip; and they were determined to show that their loyalty to the eldest son of one of their oldest and most respected families had been above suspicion. Then, too, the fact that he

had returned to them, though for two years or more all had believed him dead, was in itself sufficient cause for unusual rejoicing.

Recovering himself, Mr. Selwyn turned to his wife. "Come, Elizabeth, we must face the music together." And with her beside him and the children just in front, he stood on the platform of the car—which he now realized was a special coach decorated as gaily as the station—and gazed with moist eyes over the sea of faces, old and young, upturned to his. The music ceased, and the cheering died away; and in a few well-chosen words spoken in a strong, clear voice, he expressed his appreciation and gratitude. Then, strong arms lifted the children down, and the older men and women crowded about to grasp the hand of "Master Rob" and to be presented to his wife, more beautiful now in her added dignity of motherhood than when, on her visit as a bride, she had met with such a heartless reception, or rather no reception at all, from her husband's family. Five little girls presented each of our party with an immense bouquet of wild flowers; and presently, a tall, dark man, who had been standing a little apart, approached and was introduced as Mr. Clyde, the overseer at Cedar Ridge. As the band struck up *Hail to the Chief*, the crowd parted to form a lane through which he led the way to the big, old-fashioned, flowerdecked carriage. The driver, a very short, very stout old darkey, en-

veloped in a linen duster, stood at the heads of the fat old horses. Catching sight of Mr. Selwyn, he hastened forward as fast as his ponderous weight would permit.

“Well, well, Pompey! Is it really you?”

“It sho’ly am Pompey, Massa Rob, it sho’ly am me! An’ Ah t’anks de good Lawd fo’ lettin’ me lib to see dis day an’ fo’ gibbin’ me de oppo’tunity fo’ to ’plain ma conduct on a fo’mah ’cashun. Ah nebah done ’pected to git de chanct to do dat twell Jederal Day. But Ah ’lows dis yeah ain’t de propah time an’ place fo’ dat ’plainin’ nohow. Dey’ll be plenty ob time fo’ dat, now yo’s kem back to yo’ own agin. But Ah jes’ wishes to ’suah yo’, Massa Rob, fo’ maself an’ all de res’ ob de ole niggahs on de place, dat none ob us knowed yo’ wah acomin’ wif yo’ bride dat day—”

“Oh, I was quite sure there was some grave mistake about that, Pompey; and you may all give her a double welcome now as my wife and the mother of these little folks.”

“We sho’ly am gwine t’ do dat, Massa Rob.” The old man chuckled and bowed low to Mrs. Selwyn and the children, then opened the door of the carriage with a flourish and stood aside while Mr. Clyde assisted them into it, and the village children crowded about thrusting their bouquets into every corner and upon the floor. With elaborate care Pompey closed the door, while the overseer mounted his horse and rode on ahead.

"Ah 'lowed as yo' alls would feel moah lak ole times an' be moah comf'able in de ole kyahage; but Mistah Clyde he wouldn't heah to it, nohow. He wah fo' habin' me drike dem frisky bays; but Ah reckoned it wah ma turn to mek objections, an' Ah ups an' 'fohmed him dat ole Lily heah am skittish 'nuff when de train am on de track. Mistah Clyde am powahful ambitious 'bout mekin' a good 'pression on folkses; but Ah prefehs mekin' dem comf'able. Co'se, he wahn't bohn an' riz on de ole place lak de res' ob us."

"That makes all the difference in the world, Pompey."

"It sho'ly do, Massa Rob, it sho'ly do!" and with much puffing and blowing, the driver climbed to his seat.

Mary, who had detected the twitching of the corners of her father's mouth as Pompey had proceeded with his explanation, now looked inquiringly at him.

"This carriage was one of my mother's wedding gifts." Mr. Selwyn spoke in a low tone. "I could not help thinking that Pompey might have brought the coach. As it dates back to pre-Revolutionary days, it would surely have reminded us of old times." Then he chuckled, and Mary and her mother laughed outright; for, instead of the usual sudden start of the automobile to which they had grown accustomed, they experienced the slightest possible forward movement of the carriage.

"And Lily is skittish," Mrs. Selwyn murmured with a meaning glance at the train still on the track, the engine puffing and snorting vigorously.

"Perhaps she lost her hearing on the way to the station, Elizabeth."

At a snail's pace they moved along the main street of the little village, bowing and waving to the people, who stood on the sidewalk or walked beside the carriage, while the musicians marched before playing *Home Sweet Home*.

"One would think that I am a hero returning from the war. How would these people ever express their joy at the coming of one who had done them some great service?"

"Their hearts would find a way, Rob. But it seems to me that they feel that you have done them that service. What was it?"

"Nothing, I assure you, Elizabeth. My people have lived on the old place for over a century and a half; and there are stories of the generosity of our men when times were hard, and of the kindness of our women in days of sickness and sorrow. But I, personally, have done nothing for them. This demonstration is not in honor of what I am, but of what I stand for. The majority of these people think more of the age of a family than of its virtues or talents. My great-uncle of several generations removed was one of the first settlers in this part of the state, having come from England in 1740. So the people look upon us as among

the very oldest families in the neighborhood and honor us accordingly.”

“However that may be, I am inclined to doubt that there is nothing personal in this demonstration, Rob,—”

“Mother, they’s all little skeeties and things flying in these flowers, and they get in my eyes and nose and ev’ything,” whispered Beth, almost invisible for the masses of bright blossoms.

“Yes, Mother, they’s jes’ drefful,—they’s flying ev’y whichy way,” seconded Berta. “Do you think it wouldn’t be very p’lite to put some of the flowers out the window?”

“Be patient for a few minutes longer, and we shall see if we cannot remedy matters. It would never do to hurt the little girls’ feelings by throwing away the flowers which they took such pains to gather for us.”

“Why did they do it for us, Mother? They never did know us, not ever, ever at all.”

“Not ever ever at all.” came Beth’s faithful echo.

“But their fathers and mothers have known Father ever since he was a little baby, and they have told their children about him and his children; so they are all glad to have him come back to his old home and bring you with him. But we are nearing the outskirts of the village now, and I can see the musicians lining up at the side of the street; so the people will probably not accompany us any farther. Then we shall arrange the flowers so that you will be more comfortable.”

CHAPTER XII

PLANS.

The young people had intended to march beside the carriage to the gates of Cedar Ridge; but their elders, realizing to some extent what this home coming must mean to Mr. and Mrs. Selwyn, persuaded them to disband at the outskirts of the village so that the family might enjoy the peace and quiet of the drive along the beautiful country road.

When the crowd had fallen back, and Mrs. Selwyn felt that they were free from observation, she and her husband carefully stowed a number of the bouquets under the seats; and the twins with great sighs of relief, stretched their poor, little, aching arms.

“Oh, dear, me! Won’t we *ever* be at your house where you lived a long, long, long time ago, Daddy? I’m so tired trying to get there.”

“To *our* house, Berta,” her mother corrected. “Father’s home is our home, you know.”

“Oh, did you live there, too, when *you* were a little boy a long, long time ago, Mother? I’m quite sure I never did live there,—or Beth, or Mary, ’cause they never told me they did.”

“No, dear, none of us except Father has ever lived there; still, Father’s old home is ours, also. Don’t you remember the house in New York where Aunt Mandy was waiting for us after our

long voyage on the big boat? That was *my* home when I was a little girl a long, long time ago, as you say, though it seems a very short time to me. But after I grew up and married, it was also Father's home—home for all of us just as Bird-a-Lea is now."

"Then we have three homes—the New York home and Bird-a-Lea home and this home. 'M, 'm, 'm, seems to me that's a drefful many for one fambly."

"Mother and I have come to the conclusion that it is one too many, pet, and we are thinking of converting that one into a home for others. We must keep Bird-a-Lea, for it would never do to leave poor Uncle Frank alone, as we should have to do if we were to live always at Cedar Ridge; and we shall keep Cedar Ridge, for it is well to have a home in the South. But the New York home we think of using for another purpose. Perhaps you can tell us what we had better do with it?"

For a few minutes the twins gave themselves up to earnest thought; but there was an eager light in Mary's eyes and a flush on her pale little face which betrayed the fact that on her part no reflection was necessary.

Berta was the first to speak. "I'd like best of all for jes' little folkses that haven't nenny father and mother and Uncle Frank and Aunt Mary to

live there and have a nice, good Aunt Mandy to take care of them."

"That's jes' 'zactly what I'd like best of all, too," agreed Beth. "And have Sandy Claws come and give them dollies and—and—oh, ev'ything nice they is!"

"Good for you, little folks!" Mr. Selwyn blinked to clear his eyes of the mist which had gathered there. "And your idea, Mary? for I see that you have one."

"Something the same, Father, but not exactly. I'm very sure that the Sisters at all the asylums take good care of the orphans. But I have been thinking so much lately of the poor little children we have visited at the hospital; and it seems to me that there should be a place where they can be sent when they are well enough to leave it, but not well enough to go back to a poor home where they won't get the right kind of food and care, and perhaps will be left alone all day while their mothers go out to work. Uncle would visit them every day; and don't you think Mrs. Rooney would be just the one to put in charge?" Mary was quite breathless.

"This is evidently no new idea of yours, little daughter, and I must say that it is a very excellent one." Mr. Selwyn smiled approvingly at the little girl. "Unlike most New York houses, ours has sufficient grounds around it to insure the little

convalescents a certain amount of fresh air and sunshine—”

“But—but, Daddy, isn’t they going to be nenny chilluns there! jes’ con-con—what you said, you know?” asked Berta.

“Convalescents? But they are children—little children who have been ill, but are getting better. How long have you been planning such a home, Mary?”

“I have been thinking about it since the fall, soon after we moved out to Bird-a-Lea. That day when Uncle met us in the city and took us to the Zoo, we stopped at the hospital on our way home and saw his little patients in the children’s ward. He said that some of them were well enough to leave the hospital if only they had the proper kind of homes. The poor little things looked so thin and pale and weak that I almost cried when I thought of the places they call home; and I made up my mind then and there to ask our Blessed Mother to show me some way to help them. So if you and Mother hadn’t really decided what to do with the New York house, it seems to me that she has answered my prayers. I promised that I would ask you to do whatever she showed me as an act of thanksgiving for all the favors she has obtained for us, and to name the place in her honor.

“Of course, when I was planning everything, I wasn’t thinking of our home in the city, but of

some country place. But the New York house will be better, because the mothers and fathers can go to see their children there when they couldn't afford railroad fare. And I thought that Tommie Rooney could take the children to drive in the park if we could have a wagonette; and there is that little summer house in the yard where they can have tea parties; and there ought to be some swings and ever so many other things that I can't remember now, because this is all so unexpected, you know."

"To us as well as to you, dear," said Mrs. Selwyn. "I confess that I could not bear to think of the old place in the hands of strangers, who would probably tear down the house to make room for an apartment building. But your plan does away with all such possibilities. Perhaps I have a foolish sentiment about these old homes; but there is so much connected with them—"

"I agree with you, Elizabeth, and I have given much serious thought as to how the New York property might be utilized without allowing it to pass out of our hands. I would not like to see it become the property of another any better than that Cedar Ridge should fall into the hands of a stranger. So I, too, have made plans; but such a one as Mary's has never occurred to me."

"And we can ask Aunt Mary to write to Mother Lucy at the convent in the city and tell her about the children, and I know she will have the Sisters

visit them; and there will have to be a chapel in the house so that Mass can be said there at least on Sundays and holy days. But you haven't said what you think of Mrs. Rooney."

"I am sure that she will be a great help to us," said Mrs. Selwyn, "and she and Tommie will be far more comfortable than they are now in their poor little cottage up the road. But the little patients will need an experienced nurse to look after them and see that each one receives the care his or her case requires."

"O Mother, I know the very person for that! Gene! In her last letter she said she would finish her hospital training in April; and she just loves children, you know. If she had been my own big sister, she couldn't have been kinder to me that time she stayed with me after you and Father went away."

More than four years before, when Mary no longer needed the care of the Sister who had nursed her through a serious illness, Eugenia Donnelly, known to her friends as Gene, had acted as companion to the little girl for several weeks.

"But don't you think Gene has already made plans for the future?" asked Mr. Selwyn. "It is not probable that she would care to leave her mother in Chicago, where, I think you said, Mrs. Donnelly has a good position."

"Yes, Father, after Mr. Donnelly died, Mrs. Donnelly's brother found a position for her as

matron of some institution there. Then Gene decided to be a nurse. No, of course, she can't leave her mother. But won't we need a matron, too? Oh, if we could have both of them, just think how lovely it would be for them to be together every day! I'm sure that Gene would be glad to give up all her other plans for that. Won't you write and ask her, Father?"

"I shall be glad to do so after we have talked the matter over with Uncle Frank. If he approves of our ideas, he can begin at once to make any little alterations that may be necessary in the house. Then all will be in readiness to open our home for convalescent children as soon as we return to New York."

"Let us open it the first of May, Father, our Blessed Mother's own month. And what shall we name it?"

"Do you mean to say that you have not decided that important point when you have all the other details so thoroughly worked out?"

"Oh, I have thought of so many, many names that I really don't know which would be best. It must be some title of our Blessed Mother, because I promised that, you know. I thought of 'Mary's Home,' but on account of the great favors she obtained for us at Lourdes, it seems to me that we ought to choose a name specially connected with that shrine."

"How would 'Our Lady of Lourdes Home for Convalescents' do?" suggested Mr. Selwyn.

"Or since, as we are told, her Immaculate Conception is our Blessed Mother's most cherished prerogative, and she herself announced to Bernadette, 'I am the Immaculate Conception,' what would you think of using that title?" asked his wife.

"Those are the very two I have thought most of, but somehow I can't choose. I don't quite like that word 'Home' either; for no matter how kind we are to the children, we can never make it a real home for them—at least, not my idea of home. The grandest orphan asylum that was ever built and the kindest people in it to care for the children can never take the place of a real home. You see, I know exactly how it feels to have no father and mother; and though Uncle Frank and Aunt Mary couldn't have been dearer and kinder, neither his apartment in the city nor Maryvale was home to me. Perhaps after I had finished school and gone to live with Uncle in our New York home, I might have felt different about it—but that would have been years and years after I had lost you."

"We understand, dear." Mrs. Selwyn spoke very softly. "And as there is no immediate necessity of deciding about the name, we shall take time to think about it."

"Oh, there is another thing that we ought to

have! Do you think we could make a grotto in the yard, Father? You remember that high mound near the fence, where we used to coast when I was a little thing? Couldn't a hollow place be made in one side of it and cemented in some way to look like the brownish rock at Lourdes? Of course, our grotto wouldn't be so large; but we could make it as much like Lourdes as possible. The grottos that I have seen in churches are not enough like the real one. They are built of separate stones, while that at Lourdes is just one great mass of brown rock. I should think cement could be made to look like it."

"The construction of the grotto is something that Mother and you should be present to superintend, so we shall do nothing about it just now."

"Dear, me, Daddy! I'm quite sure the horses are going to sleep. Please let Beth and me get out and walk a little while. It's jes' been riding, riding, ev'y single time—all last night-time and nearly all this day-time in the train and now in the carriage."

"O Pomp!"

"Yas-suh, Massa Rob, yas-suh!" The team halted, and the driver leaned down from his lofty seat.

"These little people are all impatience to see the old place. Can't you make a little better time?"

"Sho'ly, Massa Rob, sho'ly Ah kin! Ah 'lowed

how yo' alls wah plumb tiahed out aftah dustin' obah de kentry in dem steam-kyahs sence las' ebenin', an' I reckoned dat yo'd be moah com-f'able ef'n Ah made Lily and Rose go easy lak. Den, too, I wahn't fo' habin' de li'l ladies skeert to def wif none ob de kintankrus antics lak what dese ole grays projected de bery las' time Ah dribed dem to de station hitched to dis same iden-teekle new kyahage. Golly! Ah suttinly 'lowed dat ole witch woman, Dilsey, done put de conjuah on dem for sho'."

"When was that, Pomp?" From the appearance of the horses, Mr. Selwyn strongly suspected the true state of affairs.

"Dat wah—lemme considah, Massa Rob..... Yas-suh! dat wah all ob 'leben yeahs ago. It wah de 'cashun when Miss Bertha done depahted on dat European towah what she done depahted on aftah ole Marse Selwyn wah daid. She nebah kem back to de ole place no moah; an' aftah we-all done heahed ob yo' def, we jes' nachelly nebah 'spected to see none ob de fambly agin. But glory hallelujah! Yo' is kem into yo' own agin, Massa Rob! Into de home ob yo' fo'cestahs befoah yo'! An' may de good Lawd leabe yo' and yohn wif us twell yo-all's as ole as 'Thusalem!"

"Thank you, Pompey, thank you! And never fear that these little people will be frightened at any prancing the grays may do."

"Yas-suh! Ah lows dey ain't no perticklah

dangeh now dat we-allz a consid'able ways fum dat steam-enjine, nohow. So we's off!"

Jerking the reins and cracking the whip, Pompey braced himself for the shock; but to his utter amazement and consternation, Rose and Lily ambled along at their former gait. "Why—why—huc-cum yo' doan' mind me when Ah gibs yo' de signal fo' to 'crease yo' speed, yo' lazy, wufless, good-fo'-nuffin' beas'es, yo! Am *dis* de way yo's gwine to depoht yo'selfs when yo's hitched to de new kyahage, adrawin' de fustest fambly in Figinny! Ain't yo' got no shame in yo' ole lazy boneses dat yo's lumbahin' 'long lak two clumsy ole elaphumps?"

A vigorous jerk at the reins and a free application of the whip followed this exhortation; but the results of so much energy expended did not come up to Pompey's expectations, and with a groan he sank back on the seat, deeply chagrined. "Dat witch woman ain't nebah done lifted de conjuah off'n dem poah beas'es, dat's suttin! But why fo' it 'fects dem disaway, and not de same as dat oddah time, am moah dan Ah kin ondahstan'."

CHAPTER XIII

DADDY'S OLD HOME

"Here is the fork in the road, which I told you about on the train, Mary. That lower branch leads down into the valley and skirts the base of the ridge; and this one that we are about to follow is our own drive to the gates. Just a few minutes more, little folks, and we shall be home."

"See the beautiful sunset! And there is the house—"

"Where, Mother, where?" The twins wriggled about to get a better view, and all gazed in silence across the sloping, fresh green fields at the old-fashioned house on top of the rise. Then Berta, always the first to speak, murmured with an approving nod, "So that's the very 'zact house where Daddy lived when he was a little boy a long, long, *long* time ago."

"The very same house, pet." Mr. Selwyn smiled down into the dark eyes regarding him so wonderfully. "What do you think of it?"

"I think—I think—oh, my thinks go ev'y whichy way at once, and I don't know how to say it! It's—it's the most beauty home they is in the whole world!"

"In the whole world!" echoed Beth.

As they neared the gates, Rose and Lily, evidently realizing that supper awaited them, quickened their pace, and presently the sound of music

again reached the ears of our little party. Mr. Selwyn laughed. "Another demonstration. It is well that the long lost heir does not return every day to his ancestral domains. The work in the fields and about the grounds would suffer; for the darkies enjoy nothing better than a celebration of this kind. I must guard against its repetition by keeping myself more in evidence."

Grouped about the gates were the colored help, men, women, and children, some sawing away at fiddles, others strumming on banjos and guitars. Amid cries and shouts of welcome the carriage was brought to a sudden stop, the horses removed, and the tongue grasped by a score of strong hands. Pompey, thoroughly disgusted at the lack of family pride in his particular pets, tossed the reins to his grandson, Tobe, with the injunction to "turn dem wufless beas'es into de pastuah, an' let dem stuff dey fat selfs twell dey bust!"

"Oh, oh, Daddy! See the beauty little vi'lets growing by the wall," cried Beth.

"Oh, yes, Daddy! Please let us get out to pick some," urged Berta.

"But we already have more flowers than we know what to do with. That is a bouquet of violets that Mary is holding. Those others will keep until another day."

But Pompey, close to the carriage door, had heard the plea, and signed to a pickaninny near him. The child scampered back, snatched a hand-

ful of the flowers, and returned to Pompey's side.

"Dah yo' is, li'l ladies!" The old darkey passed the bouquet through the window.

Like a flash the twins were on their feet exclaiming rapturously over the coveted flowers; and Berta's chubby hand reached out as she cordially declared, "Very happy to make your 'quaintance, Mr. Pompey! Beth is, too!"

"Laws a massy! *Me! Mistah Pompey!* Happy to mek *ma* 'quaintance!" And quite overcome, Pompey stepped back, placed his hand on his heart and bowed so low that, on straightening up, he found himself left far behind the now rapidly moving carriage.

"See the swing, Beth! O Daddy! *please* let us get out and have jes' one swing—jes' one!"

"The swing, too, will be there to-morrow and the day after and every day. Old Aunt Cynthy would never forgive us if we were to make any unnecessary delay and spoil the dinner she has ready for us. Early to-morrow morning I shall bring you down here and swing you to your heart's content."

"And is that the very 'zact swing where you played when you were a little boy a long, long, long, long, *long* time ago?"

"Here, here! you are rubbing it in a little too hard, Berta! I am not quite antediluvian."

"Who is Auntie Louvie, Daddy? is she like Aunt Mandy?"

"Not exactly; though some may consider Aunt Mandy rather antediluvian. How does this view of the house please your fancy, Mary?"

"It is perfect, Father, just perfect!—the house and everything, no matter which view we see!" And Mary's admiring gaze wandered from the stately, old colonial mansion over the surrounding lawns and grand old trees. With the exception of the conversation relating to the convalescent home, she had been very quiet during the long drive. In her eyes was the same tenderly proud light which shone in her mother's, and like Mrs. Selwyn, she was wholly unconvinced by her father's denial of any personal element in the rejoicings. Some of Pompey's words had sent her thoughts speeding back over two years to that moonlight evening in Georgia, when, with Wilhelmina and her brothers, she had listened to old blind Ephraim's sad story of her mother's first visit to her father's home. She contrasted her utter loneliness of that period with the wonderful happiness of the past six months; and in her heart welled up a song of gratitude that the loved ones whom she had never expected to see again in this world had been restored to her, and that faithful old Ephraim had lived to hear of this triumphant home coming.

The carriage stopped at last; and grouped on the veranda about the massive doorway stood Aunt Cynthy and the rest of the house servants.

The faces of the older ones beamed with joy as their beloved "Massa Rob" stepped from the carriage and ascended the broad, low steps, shaking hands with all. Standing on the veranda with his wife and little ones beside him, he listened to the address of welcome delivered by Ebenezer Henry Clay Jackson, the oldest darkey on the place; then, presenting Mrs. Selwyn and the children, he expressed his gratitude for the warm welcome and his happiness at being once more among them in the old home, concluding with the wish that all would enjoy the jollification of the evening—a dance followed by a feast, in regard to which Mr. Clyde had already received instructions. His emotion, as he turned and entered his old home, was very evident to Mrs. Selwyn and Mary, who kept close to him, one on each side. Together they paused a moment in the long, wide hall, so different from anything the little girl had ever seen in a private house; for the floor was paved with large slabs of smooth stone, covered here and there with rugs, and the walls and high arched ceiling were of the same material. Mr. Selwyn led the way into the large room on the left, the walls of which were lined with well-filled bookshelves reaching to the walnut-paneled ceiling. But it was not these which drew from Mary her little exclamation of surprise. She stopped short, her eyes fixed on a life-sized portrait over the mantel—a portrait so like her father if only he were twenty-five years

older, that there was no need of the question which would otherwise have risen to her lips.

"Ah, it is perfect! The artist told me about it. My sister had it done shortly before—" Mr. Selwyn crossed the room and stood gazing at the speaking likeness of his father of whose death he heard a month after it had occurred. Then, folding his arms on the mantel shelf, he dropped his head upon them. In an instant his wife was beside him; and Mary, with an arm about each little sister, quietly drew them across the hall into the great drawing-room with its massive furniture and imposing portraits dating back through the years to colonial days.

"What's the matter, Mary? why does Daddy feel so sorry?" whispered the little ones.

"He had never seen that picture of his father, and it made him remember something very sad. Let us look at the pictures in here. This must be Grandfather when he was younger than Father is now, and this is Grandmother. Wasn't she beautiful? And all these others must be Father's great-grandfathers and -mothers and uncles and aunts, who lived ever so long ago. See how old-fashioned their clothes are."

"Oh, oh! see that man with white curls hanging down, and all lace and ruffle things, and buckles on his shoes, and—and—"

"Yes, Berta, that is the way the men dressed in George Washington's time."

"And I s'pose this lady lived when Krissiferclumbus came in his nice boat," suggested Beth.

"Not quite so long ago, Bethy; but from her wig and the style of her dress, I'm sure she lived a great, great many years ago."

"Longer than when Daddy was a little boy?" Berta's tone was decidedly incredulous.

"Oh, yes, Berta. It isn't such a dreadful long time since Father was little."

"Why, no, Berta, in course not. Daddy went to school with Georgie Washingtubs, you know."

"But—but, Beth, are you *quite* sure? I think it was Abe Linkum. Don't you 'member, honey? And Uncle Frank knew Krissiferclumbus and went riding in his nice boat, didn't her, Mary?"

"I think you are both making a little mistake."

"But—but—w—well, then, how does ev'ybody know about Georgie Washingtubs and Abe Linkum and Krissiferclumbus if nennybody didn't go to school with them?"

"We read about them in books, Berta. But who do you think these little children are?"

The twins gazed earnestly at the group consisting of two handsome little boys and a sweet tiny girl; then Berta observed carelessly, "Oh, I 'spect they must be the chilluns of some of these funny old ladies and gemmans."

"But—but," Beth's eyes traveled from the picture to Berta and back again, "the biggest little boy looks 'zactly like Berta."

"Hm, he's a very nice little boy," was Berta's complacent comment.

"Don't you know who he is, Berta?"

"I know, Mary, I know! It's Daddy when he was a little boy a long, long, long time ago. And the other boy and the little girl are his brother and sister." And Beth clapped her hands triumphantly.

"Yes, Uncle Alfred and Aunt Bertha. Isn't she a darling little thing?"

Berta's eyes flashed ominously, and her voice shook with indignation. "Mary! I'm on the shock! Calling Aunt Bertha a *darling little thing!* No, no, she was bad! *Bad!*" the last word emphasized with a vigorous stamp of her little foot. "She held me tight and wouldn't let me go with Mother and Beth in the little boat—"

Mary was amazed at the sudden outburst. She had not realized how clearly her little sister remembered the details of the wreck in which the jealous aunt deliberately separated the child from her mother. "But, Berta, Aunt Bertha was as sorry as she could be before she died. Don't you remember the letter she wrote Uncle Frank?"

"No, I don't 'member nenny letter at all. I jes' 'member I was 'fraid of her eyes; and 'sides, she wouldn't let me go to heaven with Mother."

"O Berta! you mustn't feel that way about it. She was sorry and God forgave her, and so must you. It would be wrong not to. Poor Aunt Bertha

was never taught to be good. Her mother died when she was so young, and she had her own way about everything, and her teachers didn't tell her about God and our Blessed Mother and the angels. So she couldn't be expected to be as good as Father and Mother and all those we know. But God turned even the bad thing she did into good for us; for if you had gone in the lifeboat with Mother and Beth, you would never have come to Maryvale, and Aunt Bertha would never have written that letter. Mother wasn't in Heaven at all, you know; and I think we ought to be so thankful for the way everything turned out that we would forgive Aunt Bertha. Don't you think we would be very stingy if we didn't?"

"Ye—es—s, Mary."

"I knew you would feel that way about it when you understood how it was. And this picture of Aunt Bertha shows her when she was about two years old. She couldn't have been very bad then."

"She's a very nice little girl," admitted Berta, politely; "but—but Beth is *ever* so much sweeter, *I* think."

"Of course she is!" Mary was glad that she could give a hearty approval to this opinion. "And now let us see what is in here." She led the way into the adjoining room.

"A pinanny! We can practice ev'y single morning-time, Berta, same as at Bird-a-Lea, and make up some beauty new pieces before Uncle comes."

"But dear, *me*, Beth! We haven't touched the pinanny for such a drefful long time that I'm quite sure our fingers are as stiff as ev'ything." The remarks of her elders had not been lost on Berta.

"See this." Mary drew her fingers across the strings of a harp, which stood in a corner of the room. "Mother used to play the harp, and I am going to ask her to teach me while we are here."

Retracing their steps, they strolled down the hall to the spot where the walls were broken by arches. Under the one on the left, the hall led to the carriage entrance; the one on the right sheltered the massive stone staircase, beneath the landing of which was a great, open fireplace where big logs were burning and crackling cheerfully; for spring was not sufficiently advanced to do away altogether with fires.

"Isn't it all just too lovely and old-fashioned for anything?" exclaimed Mary. "Wilhelmina's home can't be nearly so old as this is. Of course, hers is old-fashioned in a way; but everything about this house, doorknobs, woodwork, and all, makes me feel as if I were living in a story book."

While Mary and Beth stood admiring the quaintly chiseled newel post, Berta set out to do a little exploring on her own account. Something behind the partly open double doors at the end of the main hallway had caught her eye and now drew her irresistibly in that direction. But all her strength was not sufficient to push the doors wider

open, and she was obliged to content herself with peeping in at the table set for dinner. Her little nose wrinkled comically as she sniffed the appetizing odors wafted to her from regions unseen; and when an elderly Negro entered the room and began to pour the water, she sped back along the hall to the library, meeting her father and mother in the doorway.

"Dinner? Surely, pet, we shall have some dinner very soon. Here is someone to announce it. Well, well, Scip, how are you? I looked for you at the gates and again on the porch, but hesitated to inquire for you, fearing I should hear that you had 'crossed Jordan.' How are you?"

"Ah's poahly, Massa Rob, poahly, t'ank Gawd!" The old man's appearance certainly belied his words. "An' as fo' bein' at de gates or on de veranda to tell yo' alls 'Howdy,' Ah 'lows Ah jes' nach'ly dussent do dat 'foah Ah had de opportunity fo' to 'plain ma absence on a fo'mah 'cashun. None ob us niggahs, 'cept ole Eph'um, s'pichuned why fo' we wuz sent off to de woods de oddah side ob town fo' a pickanick dat day. Naw-suh! An' he nebah done tol' us nuffin', 'kase he knowed mouty well dat he'd nebah be 'lowed to stay anoddah night on de ole place ef'n he done tol' de res' ob us niggahs, an' he knowed yo' wanted fo' him to stay heah, Massa Rob; an' he 'lowed dat he could 'plain 'bout de res' ob us gwine off to dat pickanick in ign'ance ob de con-

comstances ob de 'cashun. But Ah's alluz ben 'feahed dat ole Eph'um nebah done 'splained it propahly, nohow; so Ah reckoned as how Ah'd bettah do dat 'plainin' ma own self."

"Ephraim did explain it thoroughly, Scip; so set your mind at rest on that point. And now you must meet my wife and my little namesake. Elizabeth, this is Scipio Africanus Major, who saved my father from certain capture by the Yankees on one occasion."

Scip's bow rivaled Pompey's. "An' Ah hopes yo' ain't got no feelin's agin us, Missus?"

"No, indeed, Scipio. I am delighted to meet you all. My husband has often spoken of you and Pompey and many others who were so good to him in the old days."

"Yo' doan' tell me!" Scip's black face expanded visibly. "An' dis li'l lady am de spit ob him, she suttinly am! But huccome she am named fo' yo', Massa Rob? ain't dey no li'l boys in de fambly?"

"None living, Scip. Our eldest child was Robert, but he died in infancy. So, as my wife was determined to keep the name in the family, we called this little girl Roberta."

"Very happy to make your 'quaintance, Mr. Scip." Berta had been anxiously awaiting her opportunity.

"Lawd lub yo', li'l missy! *Ah ain't no mistah!* Dey ain't no mistahs 'round heah 'cep'n yo' pa

an' Mistah Clyde. Ah's jes' Scip—ole Scip what knowed yo' pa an' his pa befoah him."

"Oh, did you know my daddy when he was a little boy a long, long—" Berta caught the twinkle in her father's eye. "Well,—not such a *drefful* long time ago, but jes' kind of long. And did you know Georgie Washingtubs and Abe Linkum and Krissiferclumbus and all those funny old ladies and gem'mans hanging up in there?"

"Ah doan' perzactly 'member habin' de honah ob meetin' all ob dem grand folkses, li'l missy; but Ah's suttinly done heahed tell ob dem gemp-lums what yo' jes' done mentioned, 'tic'lahly Marse Abe Linkum; an' Ah 'lows as how Ah kin say dat Ah knows all yo' fo'cestahs by sight. But dinnah's ready, Massa Rob, an' *yo' knows ma ole Cynthy!* He! he! he! She ain't changed a mite. Jes' as perky wif dat 'tatah mashah or dat rollin' pin on her ole man's haid as she ebah wah; she suttinly am!"

CHAPTER XIV

THE STORY OF CEDAR RIDGE

“Listen to the twinnies, Mother!” Mary and her mother sat at the sunny end of the veranda, writing letters; and the delighted squeals of the two little ones were carried to them on the fresh morning air. “I’m afraid Father will be sorry he promised to swing them as long as they please, for they never get tired of that.”

“We shall have to keep an eye on them to prevent any attempt at a ‘stand-up’ swing, such as Berta pleaded for. I feel a little anxious, too, about the stream at the foot of the hill.”

“Father spoke of having wire netting run along the bank; so that ought to make it safe enough. Well, I think I have told Aunt Mary everything.” And the little girl re-read the following letter:

Dearest Auntie,

Last evening I could not help wishing that you and Uncle were here to see how glad everyone was to have Father back again. [Then followed a description of the scene at the station and the welcome to Cedar Ridge.]

After dinner, Father showed us the whole house except the attic. He says that must be saved for a rainy day when we cannot be outdoors. The house is too old-fashioned for anything. It is very broad across the front, but not so deep. The drawing-room and library are much wider than

long. Father's den is just back of the library and the music room is opposite. The dining-room and another large room just like it run across the back of the house, and are separated by panels which can be folded back against the walls so as to make one big room for a great dinner party or some such thing. The kitchen is built away from the house and connected with it by a covered passageway. The front staircase would surprise you. It is all of stone, and so are the walls beside it and the high arched ceiling over it. Father told us the reason for this is that Geoffrey Selwyn, who built the house, was once visiting a friend in a country place in England when fire broke out during the night, and before anyone knew it, the lower hall and the stairway were burning. They had to tie sheets together for ropes and lower themselves from the windows; but the father of the family and two of the children were burned to death. So when our great-uncle planned this house, he was careful to have the staircase and lower hall made of something that could not burn.

Upstairs there are a great many bedrooms. Father says that in olden times before the railroad was built, when guests came from a distance they stayed several days at least. My room is over the hall leading to the carriage entrance. I just wish you could see it. The walls are pale blue with wild roses trailing over the ceiling and around the border. There are three long windows

close together, opening out like shutters on the porch over the carriage entrance. They have little diamond-shaped panes of glass in them; and on each side of them is a cute, little, oval-shaped window. And the furniture! The bed is a great big four-poster piled so high with feather beds that I thought I would need a stepladder to get into it. I did have to push a chair to the foot of it and climb in that way so as not to flatten the feathers at one side and roll out again.

There is no electric light or gas or steam heat in the house. Those things would seem all out of place. We have candles and lamps and open fire places instead. You can't imagine how quaint everything is.

There are stories connected with some of the guest rooms, especially with the one that is just beside the great chimney of the fireplace in the lower hall. I can hardly wait to hear them; but Father says he cannot tell the most interesting ones until after the twins have gone to bed, because there is a great secret in them, and Berta and Beth are not old enough to keep it.

This morning after breakfast we walked around outdoors and saw the horses and dogs and chickens and geese and all such things. The barns are immense, and in one of them there are the funniest old carriages. You just ought to see the coach. They don't dare move it for fear it will fall to pieces.

Between the barns and the fields are the granaries and other store houses; and running back from them to the edge of the woods is a long lane bordered with shade trees. There are little cabins for the darkies on each side of it. Every fall a prize is given to the family which has had the prettiest flower garden in front of the cabin. Father says this makes the darkies particular about the way their little homes look. There is a meeting house down near the woods; and opposite it is a long, low building where they have a feast and a dance on all big days. Last night they had a celebration in honor of Father. They are so glad to have him back. I am afraid they don't care much for Mr. Clyde, the overseer. He seems to be a stiff, cold sort of man. Pompey says that is because he was not born and raised on the place. To hear him and old Scip talk, anyone would think the slave days are not over; though Father says the darkies never were slaves on this plantation after his great-uncle came here.

We are expecting Uncle and Aunt Mandy very soon. I know they will just walk in and surprise us some evening while we are at dinner.

Give my love to all the Sisters and girls, but keep the most for yourself from

Your loving

MARY.

Having folded and addressed the letter, Mary waited until her mother had finished hers, then

asked, "Do you know the history of Cedar Ridge from the very beginning, Mother?"

"Yes, Mary, Father told me the whole story on our way here thirteen years ago. To begin at the very beginning, we must go back to England in the first quarter of the eighteenth century. Geoffrey Selwyn of whom Father has already spoken, was an unmarried man. After the death of his younger brother, Robert, he became the guardian of his two children, a boy and a girl whose mother, also, was dead. When the boy, Robert, was twenty-one or -two years of age, his sister married, and he and his uncle decided to pay a visit to a distant cousin, Arthur Ward, who had not long before come to Virginia. Geoffrey and Robert Selwyn more than enjoyed plantation life; but after a month, their host developed a serious illness which soon proved fatal. Before his death, he asked Geoffrey to assist his young wife in disposing of the property, and to see her aboard a ship that would take her back to England to her own relatives.

"A few days after the funeral, Mistress Ward, when discussing her plans, declared that it was her intention to set free her slaves. Her husband had objected strongly to the principle of slavery, but he was not in a position to hire the hands necessary to work the plantation. However, he had always tried to treat the darkies kindly, and they were happy and contented; and Mistress

Ward's only anxiety was that, when free, they would be homeless. Geoffrey and Robert soon relieved her on that point. They offered either to purchase her property or to take it in exchange for their English home. The Negroes who wished to remain on the place would always have a home and be kindly treated in return for a reasonable amount of honest labor. Mistress Ward carefully explained this to the hands; and with the exception of a few adventurous spirits, they joyfully accepted Geoffrey Selwyn's terms. Even some of those who set out as free men to see the world came back sooner or later to the old place.

"Mistress Ward sailed for England, and the two men settled down in earnest to plantation life. After a year or two Robert married, and this house was built to receive his bride. Many and many an interesting story it might tell if it could, and doubtless Father knows some of them and is saving them for chilly evenings when we gather around the big fireplace. He was certainly very mysterious about that guest room just west of the great staircase.

"But the fairest story that can be told of Cedar Ridge is that the name of Selwyn has never been connected with slavery. Robert Selwyn's children and his children's children and so on down through generation after generation were thoroughly imbued with a horror of trafficking in human beings; and so, year after year, though calling themselves

‘Marse Selwyn’s niggahs,’ the darkies, with occasional exceptions, have lived on here like happy, contented children, well-fed; well-housed, cared for in health and in sickness, absolutely devoted to the family, as you see them to-day.”

“Oh, I am so, so glad that has always been the way, Mother. Even in cases where the slaves were kindly treated, it wasn’t right to buy and sell them as if they were horses and cows and sheep. But in that picture of Grandfather in the drawing-room, he wears a Confederate uniform; so he must have fought for the South.”

“He did fight for the South; but both South and North insisted that the war was not begun on account of slavery. The South claimed that it was fighting for its constitutional rights; the North, that it was fighting to preserve the Union. You will understand the subject better after you have studied about it in history.”

“Mother, do you—what do you think of Mr. Clyde?”

“I have thought very little about him in any way whatever, dear. One can scarcely form an opinion on so slight acquaintance. We have met him only three times, you know, and then for a very few minutes. Why do you ask?”

“I can’t help wondering about him. He looks so cold and stern. He isn’t one bit friendly with the old darkies as Father is. I really think that

Pomp and Scip look down on him. They act as if they think he has no right here."

"Yes, I have observed that they look upon him as an outsider—as one not 'bohn and riz on de ole place,' as Pompey expressed it yesterday. But they can hardly be blamed for feeling as they do. He is the first overseer that Cedar Ridge has known—the 'Marse Selwyn' of each generation has always superintended the work and looked after his own affairs. But while none of the family was here, it was necessary to have a competent person in charge. Otherwise, the place would not be in its present flourishing condition, and the darkies themselves would have suffered. Mr. Clyde cannot be expected to take the same interest in them as Father does. Father has known all but the youngest generation since his babyhood."

"Ye—es,—Mother,—that makes all the difference in the world. Still, Mr. Clyde might nod and smile and not be quite so—so stiff when he goes about among them."

"Perhaps he felt somewhat embarrassed to be giving directions in the presence of 'Massa Rob.' The hands have probably expected Father to take over the entire management of the place; but Uncle does not wish him to do so until he is stronger. Later on he will give Mr. Clyde a vacation and try his hand at farming."

"Mother, do you think Uncle might come today?"

"No, dear, I do not expect him to-day."

"Oh! oh! you know something, Mother! Your eyes are twinkling as they do whenever you have a secret!"

"But why should there be any secret about Uncle's coming? You saw his letter that was waiting here for Father, and there was nothing in it to lead us to think that he is coming at once."

"I know that, Mother; but I saw Father hand you a letter that was waiting for you, too; and you haven't said one word about it."

"Wouldn't that in itself be a sign that it would not interest you?"

"Hm! It might be, and it might not. But I shall keep my eyes open. We can never be too wide awake for Uncle, you know. He is just as fond of surprising people as the rest of us are. I think I shall go down every evening to meet the train and just surprise *him* a little bit,—that is, if Pompey will leave the frisky grays at home. Here come Father and the twinnies, and he has the mail."

"O Mother! come down and let Daddy give you a most 'lightful swing same as he did Beth and me. He made us go as high, as high, oh, 'most as high as the house, I'm quite sure."

"Yes, Mother; and if Tobe didn't come with the letters, Daddy was going to swing us some more."

"A letter for me, Father? I didn't expect one

to-day. Why, it's from Wilhelmina! I wonder what is the matter. She never writes until she hears from me. Isn't there anything from Uncle Frank?"

"Not a line, Mary. Perhaps to-morrow's mail will bring something."

Mary, knowing that Wilhelmina would have something to say about the story, slipped away to read the letter alone.

Dear Mary,

Why in the world dont you write and send me a chapter of the story. I spose you will say you have not had time to take off your wraps but it seems ages and ages since you left us. Dear me Mary I am nearly dead I can tell *you*. Miss Walker is just piling work onto me thick as lasses. She says I have to make up for lost time. I wish Uncle Frank was here. He would never let her make me study so hard. When he gets to Cedar Ridge ask him to write to Father and tell him it is dangerus for me and that after all the time he wasted keeping me from dyeing when I was so sick he thinks they ought to take better care of me. Anything Uncle Frank says goes around here. I hope you wont meet any girl you will like better than me. Remember Mary we adopted each other for really truly sisters. I think this is the very longest letter I ever wrote in all my livelong life. But I know you are not very perticklar about the spelling and commas and things in a

letter from me. You can put in the commas where you think they ought to go if you want to. I don't mind. And the postrofys too. And do send some of the story. I don't see how I am ever going to get time to draw the pictures though. Miss Walker tags around after me like a pollise-man. I dont care. I have a few hidding places she doesnt know about so when the story comes I am going to play hooky and kite off to one of them and draw all day long. Give my love to Aunt Lisabeth and Uncle Rob and hug the twinnies for me.

Your undyeing
WILHELMINA.

CHAPTER XV

AN EXPLORING EXPEDITION

“ ‘Rain, rain, go away,
Come again some other,
Little folkses want to play.’ ”

So sang the twins, dancing into the dining-room the following morning.

“Oh, don’t say that. We are going to play in the attic to-day; don’t you remember?”

“But—but, Mary, Ebeneasy is going to make us a cute little boat; isn’t he, Berta?”

“Yes, a most beauty boat with sails—”

“ ’Zactly like Krissiferclumbus’s—”

“Only nicer, so we can put our paper dollies in it and give them a ride.”

“And he’s going to ride it on the pond where the little chickies go to take a bath.”

“You mean ducklings, dear.”

“Yes, Mother, duckies. And it’s going to be the most fun. But the old rain won’t let us do it.”

“Never mind. It will probably be fine to-morrow.” Mr. Selwyn laid aside the morning paper and took his place at the table.

“But is it quite safe, Father, for such little folks to play about the pond?” Mrs. Selwyn had not altogether lost her fear of water. “Ebenezer does not appear to be very active.”

“No, I should not like to have them alone with him in the neighborhood of it for that very rea-

son. He is perfectly trustworthy, however, and will be invaluable when they wish to wander about through the woods. I shall tell him to arrange sailing hours at times when one or other of us can be there. Lije will attend to the wire netting along the bank of the stream; but I think the pond is sufficiently far away to be quite safe as it is."

"Will you come up to the attic with us, Father?" asked Mary as they were leaving the table.

"I have some letters to write before train time, but I shall go up later to see how the explorers are getting along."

"Do, Father. There must be ever so many things up there that you can tell stories about."

"There is one thing, at least; but you will never find it."

"Oho! if it is still there, we shall find it, Father."

"Here are two keys that I came across yesterday. They will be of use to you; and I shall give a ten dollar gold piece to the one who discovers the secret. She will have to be smarter than all the Johnnie Bulls and Yankees who have searched the old attic for a richer prize. But I am perfectly sure that I shall not be one cent poorer when we sit down to luncheon." And Mr. Selwyn chuckled as he passed into his study.

In the upper hall Mary paused. "But where are the attic stairs, Mother? I tried to find them yesterday."

"Father should have offered to give a prize to the one who discovers them, too," laughed Mrs. Selwyn. "One would expect them to lead up from this hall. Perhaps there are none, and that is why Father feels so safe about his wager."

"No stairs, Mother! Then how did anyone ever get up to the attic?"

"A ladder and a trapdoor would provide a way; but I have seen neither."

"Mother! The room that Father was so mysterious about!"

They entered a large bedroom beyond the staircase. The windows looked out on a balcony; but to all appearances, there was nothing unusual about the apartment.

"There is a door which must lead somewhere, and it does not open out on the staircase. It is too far above the landing for that. Nothing very mysterious here." Mrs. Selwyn opened the door, disclosing the object of their search built between the walls of the bedroom and the front stairway. "Be careful, little folks, the stairs are very, very steep. Wait here until I open the door above, when there will probably be a little more light thrown on them."

Mary noticed that the walls of the space where they stood, as well as those enclosing the stairway, were wainscoted with heavy oak panels; but an exclamation from her mother drew her attention to the open door above, and the children as-

cended with more haste than prudence, echoing Mrs. Selwyn's little cry of surprise as they stepped into the big, bright attic. It had evidently served as a playroom for many generations of little Selwyns. With a squeal of delight, the twins made for a large rocking-horse which Berta reached first and mounted in triumph.

"See, Beth, see! he has fur, 'zactly the same as our ponies, and long, long hair and a really tail."

"O Berta! *please* let me get on, too. He's so big I'm quite sure they's room for both of us."

"Look at this, Beth!" Mary drew a tiny tricycle into the center of the room. "Anyone would think it had been made specially for you with its blue velvet seat. Berta has the horse, and you have the carriage."

"But my carriage doesn't need a horse, so it's a 'sheen—I mean a *ma-chine*; and I can drive ev'y whichy way I like to go; but Berta's horse can only go standing still."

Leaving the little ones to enjoy themselves, Mary and her mother wandered about, examining the old toys and books with which the room was well stored.

"It is evident that the housecleaning extended up here, for though dingy and worn, everything is dustless and ready for use. See these dolls. How the young New Yorkers would laugh at anything so quaint. But the little Selwyns of long ago loved them quite as dearly as children of to-day

love their beautiful imported ones. No doubt, many of these came from France and Germany, too."

"But I thought we would find something more than books and children's things up here, Mother. There should be a spinning wheel and chests filled with all sorts of old-fashioned clothes and such things. There isn't anything to make one think of Father's secret, either."

"As I said down stairs, a door leads somewhere, and there are three in that wall besides the one at the head of the stairs. Perhaps behind them we shall find a clue to the secret as well as the other things you mention."

Mrs. Selwyn opened the door nearest them, and Mary followed her into a smaller room, which was evidently used for storing old furniture and ornaments. In one corner stood a spinning wheel, and the little girl ran to it. "Mother, how I wish I could have this in my room!"

"You may have it, dear, and anything else that takes your fancy. These treasures are all ours, you know, and I am sure that it will make Father happy to feel that you appreciate them so much. See this cradle. Judging from the way the rockers are worn, it has served the family well."

"But these candlesticks, Mother! I thought the ones down stairs must have been in the Ark, but *these!* Oh, I wonder whether the secret might be in this room! Still there are no hiding places.

Everything is right out before our eyes.”

“A hiding place that is visible at first sight is not a very safe one. The floors, walls, and ceilings of these old houses might tell many a secret if they could speak. But let us see what is in the next room before beginning our search for the hidden treasure.” Mrs. Selwyn led the way to the door next to that at the head of the stairway.

“Mother! see that immense chest! I’m sure that it is full of lovely things. Do you think we can open it? Perhaps one of those keys Father gave you will fit it.”

With some difficulty they turned the big brass key in the lock and raised the heavy lid of the great cedar box. Such a display of old time finery as met their eyes! Gorgeous gowns of faded brocade trimmed in rich lace yellowed by age; handsome suits of velvet and satin with lace ruffles at the wrists and silver knee buckles. One by one, Mrs. Selwyn lifted them from the chest and spread them over the neighboring chairs which their wearers had so often occupied. A number of swords of the styles worn at different periods lay on the floor of the chest.

“But where are the cocked hats and wigs and feathers and high-heeled slippers that went with these fine things, Mother?”

“Perhaps in that great clothes-press.” Mrs. Selwyn opened one of the doors of a massive wardrobe built against the wall. Its deep shelves were

piled high, and their contents carefully covered with old linen sheets. Removing these, she displayed to Mary's delighted gaze all the furbelows needed to complete the costumes on the chairs—ribbons and laces, jeweled buckles and sword belts, plumed hats and cocked hats, wigs of various styles, and satin slippers corresponding in color to the beautiful gowns.

"Wouldn't it be a splendid game to match all these things with the dresses and suits, Mother?"

"Your little friends would have to know more about the different periods of history before they could make a success of such a game. What have we here?" Mrs. Selwyn opened the other door of the wardrobe, showing a compartment in which hung riding cloaks and capes. Conspicuous among them were the blue and buff of the Continental Army and the gray of the Confederate.

"This one was Grandfather's." Mary stroked the folds of a heavy gray cloak. "And these must have been his boots." She took out one of several pairs which stood on the floor of the compartment.

"I think those boots were worn in Washington's time. These would better suit the gray cloak." Mrs. Selwyn lifted out another pair. As she did so, both heard a slight click, but neither gave it a thought until, turning to examine more of the contents of the wardrobe, Mary gasped and pointed to the floor of the compartment, which was

slowly opening upward like the hinged cover of a box.

"The secret! The secret, Mother!"

"Yes, you have evidently won the prize."

"You mean we have, Mother." Mary knelt and peered into the opening in the floor. "It is as black as night down there. Where does this hole lead to?"

"A hiding place, no doubt." Mrs. Selwyn spoke in a whisper. "If that is the case, we should close that door, or it will not be a secret very long. I hope Berta and Beth have not heard our exclamations."

Mary and her mother saw that the trapdoor was not merely the floor of one of the compartments of the big wardrobe. This piece of furniture was immovable, and the trap was really a section of the flooring of the room and of the rafters beneath. To the under side of the latter, rough boards were nailed, and the spaces between them and the flooring proper were filled with a coarse cement. From a large iron ring fastened to the center of the under side of the trap, a heavy rope hung into the darkness below; and at some distance to the right and left of the ring, strong iron staples were firmly secured. At each end of the trap was a very powerful spring fastened to a support beneath the floor level.

"It seems strange, Mother, that a trapdoor leading to a hiding place should open so easily.

In stories that I have read, those searching for a priest or anyone supposed to be hiding always tossed things about in wardrobes and chests and such places. If nothing but the weight of those boots holds down this door, no one would have much trouble finding it."

"You may be sure, dear, that whoever took such pains to construct this hiding place used every precaution to conceal the entrance to it. Something must be seriously out of order."

"I do wish Father would come up. I am going down to see whether he has nearly finished those letters."

"And while you are gone, I shall close the doors of the wardrobe and call Berta and Beth in to see these beautiful things before I return them to the chest. Then they will be content to go back to their play."

CHAPTER XVI

THE FAMILY SECRET

Mr. Selwyn looked up with a smile as Mary danced into his study.

"I came down to remind you of your promise, Father. You were so sure we couldn't find the secret that I was afraid you might think it perfectly safe to spend that ten dollar gold piece."

"That is just what I do think, little daughter. Where so many have failed, it is highly improbable that you and Mother will succeed."

Mary held out both hands. "Five apiece, please."

"What! What's that! You don't mean to say—" Mr. Selwyn half rose from his chair, then sank back, laughing. "No, no, you have not found *the secret*. It is something vastly more important than the old-time finery you have doubtless come across."

"We found the finery without much trouble, Father, and the secret with none at all. Come, see for yourself."

"Well, as I have sent off the most important of my letters, I shall let the others wait until this afternoon."

When they reached the attic, Mr. Selwyn had no little difficulty in escaping from the twins' eager clamoring that he remain to play with them; but after promising to show them how to use the bow and arrows which hung over the rocking

horse, he entered the smaller room and fastened the door after him. He did not believe that the hiding place had been discovered, but thought that something of unusual interest had led his wife and Mary to suppose that they had won the prize. He was, therefore, much surprised when he saw the true state of affairs.

"You would have been of great assistance to the numerous search parties which have ransacked this old attic. There has always been a suspicion among outsiders that a hiding place exists in or about the house; but the most thorough search has failed to reveal it."

"Mary and I deserve no credit for discovering it, Rob. It disclosed itself to us when we were least thinking of it."

"Ah! then something is seriously out of order. You are sure that you did nothing to release the catch?"

"We didn't know that there was a catch, Father. Oh, now I remember! Don't you, Mother? When we took out those boots, something clicked, but we paid no attention to it. I could hardly believe my eyes when I saw the floor of that side of the wardrobe coming up."

Mr. Selwyn examined the edge of the trapdoor. "Hm! the catch is badly worn, and snapped when the weight of the boots was removed."

"And is there a room down there in the dark, Father?"

"One would scarcely call it a room, Mary; but there is quite a space which has proved useful to certain gentlemen who wished to escape notice for a time."

"Do you really mean that anyone ever hid there?" The little girl's eyes opened wide in astonishment.

Her father laughed. "Certainly. You must remember that this house is very, very old and has seen some stirring times. The fact that it is located somewhat off the beaten track has made it a safer refuge than many of the homes in this part of the state. Yes, indeed, that cubby hole has been highly honored by some of its occupants. George Washington himself came very near spending a night there. Your grandfather was the last to make use of it, as far as I know; and very good use he made of it, too, for several days."

"My grandfather! Your very own father! Oh! Won't I have something to tell Wilhelmina when I write to her!"

Mr. Selwyn regarded Mary quizzically for some moments, then quietly remarked, "No one but the older members of the immediate family and those who have been concealed here have ever known of the existence of this hiding place."

"Well, I *am* a great one! Here I am ready to tell all I know about it. Of course I shall keep the secret, Father. But now that there is no use for such places, why should it be a secret any longer?

There hasn't been a war in this country for ever so long. It would be a fine place for hiding Christmas presents; but there are ever so many good places in the house for such things."

"One never knows when a place like this would be not merely a convenience, but a real necessity."

"You are right, Elizabeth; and mark my words, Mary, this hiding hole will be a Godsend some day when we least expect to use it. That is why I intend to repair the catch at once and to show both of you the means of opening and closing the trap-door."

"It is exactly like a story book," declared Mary with a little shiver of delight.

"Very interesting stories could be written from some old manuscripts which I have under lock and key downstairs,—accounts of the many times this old attic has been searched by the 'other side' during some of the wars in which our country has been engaged. But more of them another time." Mr. Selwyn pushed down the section of flooring and removed the boots. "These should not be here at all. If one of them should topple over and be caught in the side of the trapdoor as it is closed, there would be an end of our secret." He closed the door of the compartment and called attention to the large, rounded heads of the screws holding the hinges in place. "To release the catch it is necessary merely to loosen the

middle screw of the lowest hinge with one's fingers; and when the trapdoor is again fastened down, the screw whirls back into place. Have you come across any candles in your exploring expedition? If I had a light, I could give you a glimpse of the little room below."

"Here is a small piece of one in this old candlestick, Father."

"That will do nicely. Now, get your bearings. These three storerooms occupy the north end of the attic. This one is narrower than the other two. Can you tell me, Mary, what part of the house is immediately under this room?"

"Let me think, Father. The door of this room is nearest the one at the head of the attic stairs, and they are built between the wall of that guest room and the front stairway. Then the stairway is below us—but no, it can't be, for the chimney between the windows here is too narrow."

"Nevertheless, it is the upper part of the big one on the stair landing. Here you see only the chimney proper, which is about the same width as the fireplace in the lower hall—eight feet. The brick structure at each side of the fireplace and of the chimney on the landing is mere sham—though one side of it is a very important sham, as it serves to conceal a passageway leading up from the foundation of the chimney to this hiding place. The passageway may be entered in two other

places: through a panel in the wainscoting of the small room next to the big fireplace, and through a panel at the foot of the attic stairs. Strong iron spikes driven into the walls at regular intervals, enable an active person to ascend or descend through the passage with little difficulty. The chimney is so solidly built that all the rapping and tapping of search parties have failed to disclose the passageway concealed within its walls. Just below this floor it widens out, following the shape of the arched ceiling over the staircase.

"But to return to the hiding hole. You can readily see that there must be quite a space on each side between the ceiling below us and the floor of this room. Our great-uncle, Geoffrey Selwyn, was quick to realize the value of such a space adjoining the chimney; but he knew, also, that the suspicions of a search party would be aroused by the spaces which they would see must exist over the ceiling in the lower hall as well as here over the stairway. Unable to break through the stone vaulting or the solid brick walls of the adjoining rooms, they would tear up the floors above. Therefore, with the assistance of his nephew and two trusted servants whom they had brought from England, he laid in this room and in the upper hall a double flooring, with the space between filled with coarse cement. A search party would be certain to begin work in the latter place, and on tearing up any part of the flooring there,

would naturally think that the whole space was filled with cement to aid in holding in place the stone slabs of the ceiling below. This is what actually happened on more than one occasion. Disappointed downstairs, they merely removed a board or two in the floor up here to assure themselves that the same conditions existed. That chest and this wardrobe were, of course, thoroughly searched; but the ladder there against the wall, leading to the trapdoor in the roof, was quite enough to throw them off the scent."

Mr. Selwyn lighted the candle and returned it to Mary; then let himself down through the opening in the floor. "The proper way to descend into this little room is to seize the rope with both hands and swing down, drawing the trap with one. But I wish to show you a means of fastening it so that, even should the secret be discovered, anyone hiding down here would still have time to escape through the passageway in the chimney. You see those staples on the under side of the trap. Just above my head here to the right are two strong iron bolts which, when the trap is closed, can be slipped through those staples on it. The trap-door is then securely fastened down. Now, Mary, let me have the candle, and I shall give you a peep at our secret room. This strip of floor on which I am standing, though very narrow, extends to the wall beside the chimney, so that the fugitive has room enough for a little exercise. A few rays of

light and a breath of fresh air are admitted through spaces which have been made by removing three or four bricks in that outer wall. There is a narrow cot with a comfortable mattress and bedding at that end of the room; and one of the first duties of the mistress of the house on the arrival of a guest who might find it necessary to make himself invisible for a time, was to place a well-filled basket of provisions down here. So, you see, a fugitive would not be so badly off even if forced to spend some days in our hiding hole. But more of all this another time.” Mr. Selwyn climbed out and closed the trapdoor. “Berta and Beth will grow impatient at this long delay. This evening after they have gone to bed, I shall tell you of my father’s experience when he was obliged to take refuge here.”

“Oh, dear, *me*, Father! It’s just too exciting to think of living in a house like this. I have read stories of secret rooms and hiding holes; but when a person hid in them, he usually had to stay there until the search party went away—that is, if he wasn’t found.”

“Geoffrey Selwyn had lived in England long enough to know the value of a safe hiding place and, therefore, spared no pains to make this one all that it should be. But you cannot realize how perfect it is until you have heard at least one of the stories which I shall tell you about it.”

CHAPTER XVII

HOW SCIP OUTWITTED THE YANKEES

"Now for the story, Father." Mary, who had just rejoined her father and mother before the big fireplace in the lower hall, seated herself on a low stool between them. "The twinnies went to sleep the minute their heads touched the pillows. They are hoping that it will rain all day to-morrow so they can play again in the attic. I must say this has been the loveliest rainy day that I have ever spent. But this isn't the story, and I am so anxious to hear it."

"Then let us begin at once. My grandfather died in 1860; and when the war broke out and my father went with his regiment, his mother felt very keenly the parting with her only son. He, too, experienced no little anxiety at leaving her and his two sisters unprotected; but the fact that this place is some distance from the main road led him to hope that it would be less liable to invasion than many of the homes in this locality. And this was really the case; for the strip of woodland along the road hid the fields from passers-by; and the cedars, which at that time grew more thickly near the edge of the ridge, effectually concealed the house from view. Another thing which greatly relieved the whole family was the fact that the Negroes here were already free so that the war meant nothing to them. The work in the fields

went on as well as could be expected with my father away; and many a wagon load of grain and other provisions found its way to the Confederate lines, while the people in the village wanted for none of the absolute necessities of life. Of course, my grandmother and aunts cut down expenses as much as possible in order to help the cause; but my father had the consolation of knowing that they were never in actual want as were so many of the women and children of the South.

"During the first two years of the war he found it a difficult matter to pay even a flying visit to his home; but in the spring of the third year his regiment was stationed some twelve miles north of the village, and as there seemed to be a lull in the hostilities, he was given a week's furlough to visit his mother. Arriving in the village after sunset he learned that no Yankees had been seen in the neighborhood for a month or more; so he came on without delay. Twilight was fast deepening into darkness; and the nearer he approached the ridge, the less cautious he became. So busy was he picturing the coming reunion that he completely forgot the road into the valley until he reached it. Then his heart leaped; for not five hundred feet down the main road stood a group of ten or twelve Yankees waiting to see who was galloping on toward them. They had no suspicion of the private road. Even in the gathering darkness, they rec-

ognized the uniform, and springing into their saddles, came on in hot pursuit.

"Needless to say, my father had not delayed for an instant, but had spurred his horse up the private road over the stones and boulders which had purposely been strewn there to give it a disused appearance. He had the advantage of knowing exactly where he was going, and gained the gates before the Yankees appeared around the bend in the road. Instead of making for the house, where he feared he would not be admitted without delay, as his sisters bolted and barred the doors at sundown, he turned sharply to the left, and keeping close to the wall, reached the edge of the ridge, where the thick growth of trees and shrubbery formed an almost impenetrable screen. There he dismounted just as his pursuers swept through the gates and up the driveway toward the house. He could now have made his escape by fleeing back along the road over which he had just traveled; but he had no intention of being cheated out of his holiday. There were two ways by which he could gain an entrance to the house, where he wished to be when the Yankees, satisfied that he was not in it, began to search the grounds. The easier and shorter way was to tie his horse where he was, trusting to meet one of the darkies whom he could send to remove it to a place of safety before the search party should come upon it. Then, by making his way in the

shadows of the trees and shrubbery to the old well which you saw yesterday almost hidden in that clump of lilac bushes some fifty feet north of the house, he could lower himself into it by means of the chain, and when he pressed a small knob concealed under the moss, the bottom of the cistern would open downward, admitting him to a little underground passageway leading into the foundation of this chimney.

"But the fear of running into a sentry made him decide on the longer, but safer way. Leading his horse along the edge of the ridge and down the hill to the stream, he crossed and followed it westward to a point opposite the densest part of our woods. Recrossing, he made his way to a little old hut, almost concealed among trees and undergrowth, where he hid the horse. Then he ran for the Negro quarters. They were, of course, deserted, as the darkies had gathered back of the house and around the barns, conjecturing as to whom the Yankees were after. Keeping to the north of the cabins, my father reached the one nearest the granary, and groping about in it, found the ladder and climbed to the loft. From a tiny window there he could see lights moving about in the attic of the house. He wondered how many of the handsome walnut panels in the dining-room walls and in the wainscoting of the next room had been broken into before his pursuers were convinced that the walls behind them

are of solid brick; and how much of the flooring in the upper hall had been torn up in their fruitless search for him."

"But you say, Rob, that a panel in the corner of this next room opens into the passageway in the chimney. Since it is customary for a search party to sound a wall before breaking into it, how did that happen to escape notice?"

"That panel, Elizabeth, like the one at the foot of the attic stairs, is backed with bricks properly cemented together; so when struck the wood does not give out a hollow sound; and if broken into, there is a brick wall behind it. The panel opens out like a door. To-morrow I shall show you the means of opening it. A search party wastes little time looking for buttons to release springs; they simply break into a wall which arouses suspicion."

"But, Father, the loft of a cabin wasn't much of a hiding place. Surely, the Yankees would search the barns and every building on the grounds."

"My father was well aware of that fact, Mary; and when he saw that the light had disappeared from the attic, he knew he had no time to lose. In that particular cabin there is a chimney built exactly like this one, but on a smaller scale. That cabin has never been occupied; for Robert Selwyn of long ago took particular pains to make the darkies believe that it was haunted. A ghostly figure was seen there more than once, and lights

of an unearthly color appeared occasionally. Even to-day, you could not persuade a darkey on the place to enter that cabin in broad daylight. At the right hand end of the chimney, the third brick from the wall in the third row from the floor is very important. The same is true of the chimney in the hiding hole upstairs. A sharp rap on that particular brick releases a spring behind it, and a section of the chimney opens out just as the panel in the next room does. After I have done a little house cleaning in the hiding hole, I shall show you just how the bricks in the chimney ends are laid, and you will see how it was possible to construct those doors, which an expert would have trouble to detect. Just inside them is a narrow ledge. Standing on that, my father drew the door closed behind him, felt for the lantern which he knew should be hanging on the wall at his right, lighted it, and lowered it by means of the attached cord to the foundation of the chimney. Climbing down himself, he made his way through the tunnel which leads into the foundation of this chimney, and climbed up through the passageway here at our left until he reached the ledge at the opening into the hiding hole. There he extinguished the lantern; for a ray of light seen through the chinks in the outer wall of the little room would betray the secret.

“Entering the hiding hole, my father at once slipped the bolts beneath the trapdoor. Then he

threw himself on the cot to rest and listen for the five distinct clicks of the catch—the signal that a member of the family was above. He would have felt better satisfied if he could have made his exit from the passageway into this next room if only for a moment to assure his mother of his safety; for he knew she would suspect that he was the fugitive. But he feared that one or two Yankees might still be prowling about within the house; so he thought it better to wait until his mother would come up to the attic in search of him, as he was sure she would do as soon as the way was clear. It was fully an hour before he heard the click of the catch on the trapdoor. He waited, not knowing whether friend or foe was above.”

“But I should think he could tell by the footsteps, Father.”

“It would require a sound louder than the heaviest footsteps to penetrate that thick flooring, Mary. But my father was not kept long in doubt. The click was repeated five distinct times; so he slipped back the bolts, the trapdoor opened, and he saw his mother and sisters eagerly peering down at him. The fact that the contents of the chest and wardrobe were scattered about the floor would be sufficient excuse for this trip to the attic; and faithful Scip had been left on guard at the door of the room opening on the attic stairs to give the alarm in case the Yanks decided to revisit it. The women had bolted the door at the head of

the stairs so that my father would have ample time to regain his hiding place. The visit was a short one; for my grandmother was anxious that my father should have some food. Fearing that they would be caught if they tried to carry it up to him, the women decided to put it in a basket which they would find an opportunity of hanging on one of the spikes just inside of the panel in this next room. Fortunately, all the Yankees had left the house after ordering old Cynthy to prepare a meal for them, and my grandmother and aunts were able to fill a large basket with food enough to supply my father for the next day.

"For two days those Yanks hung around the place, entering the house when least expected and prowling about the grounds and through the woods. They had an idea that the man they were after was the bearer of important dispatches. The fact that in the stables there was no horse fit to ride puzzled them somewhat, but did not change their opinion that the fugitive was concealed on the premises."

"Then they didn't find the horse hidden back in the woods, did they, Father?"

"No, Mary; for, from the first, Pompey strongly suspected that my father had come home, and knew that his horse must be hidden not far away. So, while the Yankees were searching the house and the grounds around it, Pompey was plunging through the woods. Finding the horse, he took it

to a safer hiding place known only to himself.

"On the morning of the third day, to the great relief of everyone, the Yankees rode away. But Scip was suspicious of their intentions and decided to keep his eyes open and to do a little private scouting.

"To satisfy his mother, my father did not show himself outdoors; but he laughed at Scip when the faithful fellow implored him to continue to sleep in his hiding place—though where that was, Scip had no idea—or, at least, to have no light in his room at night. The only precaution my father would take to satisfy him was to occupy the guest room at the foot of the attic stairs. The news that a regiment of Confederate soldiers had encamped just north of the village relieved Scip's mind to some extent; but he refused to go to bed at night, and gave my father to understand that three prolonged hoots of an owl in the great tree near his window would mean that his pursuers were again at hand.

"The first night all went well, and poor Scip was rallied by my father for his fears. But the second night, well on after midnight, a shower of large pebbles roused my father to sudden consciousness of the hooting of the owl outside his window. He sprang up, seized his clothing, and disappeared through the panel doorway at the foot of the attic stairs just as Scip swung himself from a limb of the tree to the balcony and

leaped through the window. Finding the bed empty and his master gone, he got into it himself and drew the covering well up around his ears. He heard the crash which told him that the Yankees had succeeded in forcing their way into the house. A moment later they were thundering at the bedroom door, which they soon burst open. With a triumphant shout they rushed toward the bed, but fell back when Scip's woolly head emerged from the blankets and his quavering voice protested, 'Why—why—why fo' yo' gemplums come in heah disaway distu'bin' de slumbahs ob a poah, tiahed niggah what yo's been prospectin' to sot free ebah sence de wah begun? Ain't yo' alls done did 'bout 'nuff huntin' round dis heah place to 'suah yo'selfs dey ain't nobuddy to catch?' He knew that to delay the Yankees for even a few minutes might be the means of saving his beloved 'Massa Rob' from falling into their hands; and to their questions as to my father's whereabouts, he merely replied, 'Marse Selwyn done went to fight de Yankees neahly three yeahs ago, an' Ah doan' know whah he am now.'

"My grandmother and aunts, aroused by the crash downstairs, now appeared in the doorway. Their amazement and relief were great when they saw who was in the bed; but to gain more time for my father, my grandmother made a fine show of indignation at sight of Scip occupying a guest room in the house. 'But, Missus,' protested Scip,

'ain't Massa Rob done tolle me 'foah he went to fight de Yankees, an' ain't yo' done 'mpressed it on dis yeah niggah dat Ah's bound to tek cahe ob yo' an' de young ladies, leastways when dem d—d Yankees comes rampagin' round heah? An' now why fo' yo' go blame poah Scip fo' doin' ob his dooty good an' propah, Ah lak to know? Ef'n Ah wahn't in de house perteckin' yo'alls, what's gwine keep dem Yankees fum runnin' away wif yo,' huh?'

"The soldiers demanded the meaning of the pebbles strewn about the floor; but Scip in well-feigned surprise asked if they themselves had not thrown them in at the window. In disgust, all but the leader scattered to search the house. He remained to cross-examine Scip, who proved more than a match for him. The others soon returned and decided to resort to force to compel Scip to reveal the hiding place of their prey. Scip upbraided them. 'Am dat de way yo' gemplums fum de No'f am gwine compoht yo'selfs towahd a poah niggah what yo'alls ben fightin' fo' three yeahs to sot free? Co'se, yo' nebah done needed to bothah fightin' fo' de niggahs on *dis* place. Marse Selwyn's niggahs wuz alwuz free.'

"'Free or not free, you are a Southern sympathizer;' and in spite of my grandmother's remonstrances and protestations that Scip told the truth when he denied any knowledge of my father's whereabouts, the poor fellow was dragged out

of bed. When they found him fully dressed, they were still more enraged, and hurried him down the stairs and through the lower hall. Suddenly he astonished my grandmother and aunts by exclaiming, ‘Wait, gemplum, wait! Ah’s gwine tell yo’ persackly whah Marse Selwyn am. Ah sho’ didn’t know upstahs, but Ah knows now. *Dah* he am, waitin’ fo’ to catch yo’alls! He! he! he!’

“The Yanks whirled about to see my father, accompanied by twice their number of Confederate soldiers, standing in the doorway. ‘You are our prisoners, gentleman,’ he quietly remarked; and covered by the guns of the Confederates, the Yankees realized that resistance would be futile and yielded with the best grace they could muster. It was the work of a moment to disarm them; and Scip was made happier than he already was by a pair of handsome pistols.

“After watching his companions ride away with the prisoners, my father entered the hall where Scip was explaining matters to the women. The day the Yankees had taken themselves off, he had paid a visit to the Confederate camp and had told some of the soldiers of his fears for my father’s safety. They promised to come to the rescue at any time that Scip would call on them. The regiment had a dog, a great pet, which, when separated from the soldiers for any reason, always found its way to camp in an incredibly short time. They let Scip take this dog with the understanding that

the moment it should appear in camp, they would set out at full speed for Cedar Ridge. During the day, Scip kept the dog locked up in his cabin; but at night he had the animal with him, keeping a firm hold on the strap attached to its collar. When he saw the dark forms of the enemy moving along the opposite bank of the stream, he loosed the dog, which set out at top speed across the lawn and through the fields, while Scip wasted no time climbing the tree to warn my father. ‘But huc-cum yo’ to know ’bout dem sodjers acomin’ fum de camp back yondah, Massa Rob?’ he demanded. My father assured him that it was only by accident that he had fallen in with them. He could say no more without disclosing the family secret, though, personally, I think no one would keep it better than poor Scip. After the faithful fellow had listened with delight to the expressions of gratitude poured out by the family, who drank his health with the last bottle of my grandmother’s currant wine, he left them together in the dining-room; and my father completed his story. Fearing that he would not have time to reach the hiding hole by way of the attic, he had flung his clothing into the passageway in the chimney and climbed down to the foundation to dress. Then, groping his way through the tunnel to the old well, he drew himself up by means of the chain to reconnoiter. Now and then he caught a glimpse of the sentry watching the north side of the house;

and after a time he saw a line of dark figures emerging from the fields. He realized who they were and that they had chosen the bridle path through the fields, because their horses would be heard on the hard road. Joining them, he helped to seize and gag the sentries, who were so intent on watching the house that they paid no attention to the grounds. So that was one time that the Yanks were caught napping."

Mary heaved a great sigh. "And to think that I can never, *never* tell this story to anyone, Father."

"*Never* is a long time, little daughter. I give you full permission to tell it to Uncle Frank as soon as he arrives; to Aunt Mary on our return to Bird-a-Lea; and to Berta and Beth when they are old enough to keep a secret. And it is not altogether improbable that you will be sitting here before the blazing logs some evening with your own boys and girls about you, listening as breathlessly as you have done to the story of how the Yankees were outwitted by faithful old Scip."

CHAPTER XVIII

BAB.

“So this is where you are!”

Mary, writing at a massive, richly-carved, walnut desk, which she had noted among the other old furniture in the small room of the attic and had mentally decided was just the place for her literary labors, started at the sound of her mother’s voice.

“Doctor Wren with his daughter and his little grandchild are down stairs, dear. My, my! To see all this manuscript strewn about, one would think that you are writing a book.”

The little girl laughed gaily. “That is exactly what I’m doing, Mother. It is supposed to be a secret between Wilhelmina and me; but in my letter to her I told her that I really didn’t feel comfortable about having even this kind of a secret from you, and that I was going to tell you, and she could tell Aunt Etta, but no one else. She begged me to write a story about the twinnies, and she is drawing the pictures for it. Here are those she has finished.”

“I should enjoy nothing better than to look at them and to read as much of the story as you have written; but our guests are waiting for us, and we must go to them without more delay.”

“Oh, I had forgotten all about them.” Mary gathered up the precious pages of her story and

slipped them into a drawer of the desk; then followed her mother down to the drawing-room.

Doctor Wren was their nearest neighbor, his grounds being separated from Cedar Ridge by the little stream. Two grandchildren, a boy and a girl, made their home with him. The little girl was about Mary's age, and both children were delighted at the prospect of good times together. To Barbara's great embarrassment, her grandfather described her state of mind since the coming of the Selwyns. "Indeed, she tried to persuade us to call the evening you arrived; and in spite of the rain, she hovered along the banks of the stream nearly all day yesterday, hoping to make Mary's acquaintance in a less formal manner."

A patter of little feet in the hall, and the twins, fresh and rosy after their nap, appeared in the doorway. None of the handsome paintings on the walls could surpass the picture which it now framed as the little ones stood for a moment against the mellow background of the stone wall of the hall. Cherry colored ribbons at the neck and sleeves of her little white dress set off Berta's dark beauty; while pale blue did the same for Beth's fair loveliness.

"Oh, you darlings!" Barbara ran and threw her arms about them; and Beth, always timid at meeting strange grownups, welcomed the delay and willingly returned the caresses. But Berta wriggled herself free and quickly crossed the room

with hand outstretched, and her usual, "Very happy to make your 'quaintance. Beth is, too, but she doesn't like to say it so very well, so Mother says it's all right for me to say it for both of us, 'cause we's twins, you know."

The Doctor took her on his knee and asked her name.

"My name is Berta Roberta Selwyn, 'zactly the same as Daddy's; and my little sister's is Beth Elizabeth Selwyn, 'zactly the same as Mother's."

"And mine is Barbara Estelle Gwendolyn Wren."

"Barbara!"

But her aunt's laughing protest merely called forth the explanation: "Why, yes, Aunt Virgie, didn't I tell you about that? I've never been able to understand why Howard has three names, and I have only one. So I wrote down every pretty name I heard or saw in books, and then I picked out the ones I liked the very best and wrote them on separate slips of paper and drew two. A person gets tired of being a 'plain Jane without frizzes,' you know."

The Doctor stiffened visibly. "You bear your grandmother's name, my dear."

"I know I do, Grandfather, and I love it and want everybody to *call* me Barbara. But I just want a few initials to sign to a letter or a composition. But you," giving the twins another hug, "may call me Bab for short. Nearly everyone does."

Berta heaved a sigh of relief. "I'm so glad they's a short for it, 'cause I'm quite sure Beth and I couldn't 'member such a drefful long name ev'y single time, not ever, ever at all."

"Not ever, ever at all," agreed Beth.

Then the twins decided that it was time to take Bab to see the little gaily-painted sailboats which Ebenezer had made for them. As soon as the four children were out of hearing of the grown people, Bab caught Mary's hand.

"You can't imagine how glad I am that you are here at last! Ever since October when your uncle was down and told us you were coming, I have simply counted the weeks until you would be here."

"I am just as glad to be here and to know someone my own age, Barbara."

"Oh, for pity sakes, don't call me that! Do, please, say Bab!"

"But didn't you just tell your grandfather that you love the name Barbara?"

"Don't you ever say anything you don't mean, Mary?"

"Why—n—no, Barb—I mean, Bab,—at least, I always try to say exactly what I mean."

"Hm! You couldn't do that if you lived at our house. Why, I spend nearly all my time pretending I just love things that I really hate—*hate!* Oh, you needn't look so surprised, Mary! Aunt Virgie has to do the same. Dear, me, I'm just the lonesomest girl in the whole wide world!"

"I think I know someone who is even more lonely than you are, Bab. She hasn't a relative on earth that she knows of. Her father, mother,—everyone belonging to her is dead. She is a boarder at the convent where I go to school—"

"Oh, that's so. You're Catholics." Bab regarded Mary with an expression of wonder on her freckled little face. "And are there nuns in that convent?"

"Of course there are, Bab. They teach the girls and take care of them."

"I'd just love to see a nun. I've never seen even a picture of one."

"You haven't! I think I have seen hundreds of sisters. Mother's sister is one, you know. I shall show you her picture before you go home."

"Please do. But about that girl. If she has the nuns to take care of her and so many girls to play with, she simply can't be as lonely as I am."

The twins had gone to find Ebenezer, and the two older girls seated themselves on a bench under the trees.

"But you have your grandfather and your aunt and your brother, Bab,—"

"Yes, and didn't you notice how fond Grandpa is of me? O Mary, I've been just longing for someone to talk to—someone of my own age. I haven't a single, solitary girl friend. Just because Grandpa is a doctor, and we belong to one of the oldest families around here, he won't let

me play with the girls in the village. About twice a year, he and Aunt Virgie and I dress up and drive miles to call on some other old families. Even where there are children, we just sit up like sticks in the parlor. And those girls are regular snobs. They smile in a way—oh, you know how I mean—because we're poor, and I haven't pretty dresses and hats like theirs, and—”

“Why, Bab, I don't see how anyone *could* smile at that dress you are wearing. It is beautiful material and made so prettily. I'm sure I haven't anything half so fine.”

“But it's about a hundred years old, Mary. Yes, I mean it. It has been made over three times and dyed twice; and I don't know how long Aunt Virgie wore it before I got it, and she found it in an old trunk in the attic to begin with. Why, I haven't had a new dress since I came to live with Grandpa. And I have worn this one every time I have gone to see those girls, and oh, dear, me! it must be grand to be rich and to travel as you've done, and to wear pretty dresses every day! I know you didn't change yours after we came; because your mother said she had a time finding you, and you came right down with her. It's just awful to be poor the way we are.”

Mary laughed incredulously. “Poor, Bab! You can't say you are poor when you have such a beautiful home.”

“Wait until you get closer to it. After being

in your house, I'm ashamed to have you come over to ours. Why, it's almost tumbling down, and the furniture and rugs are so worn and faded; and the grass, the part that's cut, is full of weeds, and the fields are regular jungles. Everything is going to rack and ruin. You see, the darkies on our place were slaves; and when they were freed, they went North. There isn't one of them left except old Ceely, our cook, and Nat, her husband, and he's almost blind. I tell Aunt Virgie we ought to sell the place and move to the city so I could go to school like other girls. Grandpa won't let me go to the one in the village, but teaches me himself. And wait until you see our barns. They're simply falling to pieces, and there's only one horse, Grandpa's, but he lets Howard ride him whenever he pleases. I hardly dare look at him. You see, Mary, Howard is a Wren, but I'm not. Oh, no, I'm not adopted—I just happen to look like poor Mother, and that makes all the difference in the world. Grandpa couldn't bear Mother; and he was so angry with Father for marrying her instead of some girl belonging to one of the old families he knows that he would never have any more to do with him. Mother was a Northerner, too, and that made things a million times worse. There were only Father and his brother and Aunt Virgie; and after Uncle Jack was killed in the Spanish-American War, Father should have come in for the old place, because Uncle Jack wasn't

married. But Grandpa never forgave Father, not even when Mother wrote and told him that Father was dying. I was only two years old then, and Howard was five; and after poor Father died, Mother was sick for a long time in a hospital and that took all the money; and she wasn't strong enough to do hard work, and all her near relatives were dead, and she tried her best to take care of Howard and me for nearly two years. Then she got sick again and just had to write to Grandpa for help. Aunt Virgie told me all about it. Father was her favorite brother, and she loved Mother and tried to coax Grandpa to forgive them and have us all come back here to live. But Grandpa has a terrible will; and though he worships Aunt Virgie, he wouldn't give in. And Aunt Virgie knew just how hard it was for Mother to ask him for help for us and to remind him that we are his own son's children, named for him and Grandma—she was dead then—and to tell him she didn't ask anything for herself, but if he wouldn't do something for us until she was able to work again, she would have to put us in an orphan asylum. And then, Mary, *then what do you think!*" Bab tossed back her heavy auburn braids, which had fallen over her shoulders, and her brown eyes grew black with anger. "He wrote and told Mother that he would take his own son's children and bring them up as his own if she would give up all claim to us and take some other name besides

Wren herself. Poor Mother! When she asked the doctor how soon she would be able to go back to work, he told her that she would scarcely ever be able to support even herself and that she had better put us in an asylum. He didn't know about Grandpa. And then Aunt Virgie went to Richmond, pretending she had some shopping to do, but really to see Mother. She couldn't help her with money, because Grandpa made her keep an account of every cent she spent; but she promised Mother to love us and take care of us and never let us forget her. So poor Mother gave us up. O Mary! you don't know what it means! You don't know what it means not to know whether your very own mother is dead or alive and poor and cold and hungry—”

Mary's voice was very low as she put her arms about Bab. “I do know, Bab, I do know! Most girls wouldn't understand, but I do. From June until the next Christmas I thought Mother and my little sisters were down at the bottom of the ocean; and then we found Berta, and she told me things—”

“Yes, yes, Mary, of course you know! Oh, I'm so glad someone does! Your uncle took dinner with us when he was down here last fall, and he told us about the shipwreck, and about those awful savages in India who took your father prisoner so that you all thought he was dead, too. Why, it was so exciting that I couldn't eat a

mouthful, and everyone laughed at me. Your uncle was so kind, and he never seemed to notice all the darns in the tablecloth and napkins—I must say Aunt Virgie does them beautifully—and he brought me over here to choose your room and to tell him how to have it done. Didn't he tell you?"

"Not a word, Bab. Uncle is the greatest one for surprises, and I couldn't find out from him whether there were any girls of my age living near here. And my room is lovely, Bab, lovely! It is the very one I would have chosen, and blue is my favorite color."

"I'm so glad you like it. O Mary! You don't know how I felt in there when Grandpa took Berta on his knee and patted her head and all that. I was just her age when I came to live with him, and he never, *never* so much as kissed me once—not *once!* I look like Mother, and that settles me with him. He won't let Aunt Virgie buy me a single new thing. I have to wear all her left-overs."

"But if they are all as pretty as the dress you are wearing, Bab, I shouldn't think you would mind very much."

"Yes, you're saying that to be polite. Why, Mary, if I don't know my lessons perfectly every day for him, he sends me to bed early, and won't let me have anything but bread and milk for supper, and treats me as if I were about two years old. If I weren't afraid of being caught and clapped into an orphan asylum, I would have run

away long ago and found Mother. I have her picture in a locket, but Grandpa doesn't know, or he wouldn't let me keep it. But I don't know whether Mother stayed in Richmond, or went back North. And I don't know what name she has taken. Aunt Virgie says to be patient, and everything will come out all right. If Howard were only different, we could go together to find Mother when we are a little older. But all he thinks of is getting Grandpa to give him money to spend. Grandpa just dotes on him and says he will be head of the family, and that Wrenwood must be kept in—in—oh, something that means *whole* for Howard. And hundreds of acres going to waste when men have offered a good price for the south fields. Why, Mary, if he would sell that part of the place, Aunt Virgie says we could fix up the house and grounds around it and hire someone to work part of the land. But no! the place must be kept *whole* for Howard; and poor Aunt Virgie must skimp and save and patch and darn and mend and dye things and make my clothes over and over and over so Howard can go to college and be a gentleman. Yes, I know it's awful for me to talk like this about my own brother, but I can't help it. I just boil to see Grandpa planning to do so much for him when he doesn't 'preciate it. What does the old place mean to him? After Grandpa dies, he will sell it to the first old land shark that comes along, and go off and have a good time with the

money. He's going now with a crowd of hateful boys—oh, yes, they belong to old families and all that—but I'd much rather see him with the roughest ones in the village. I'm so worried about him, and so is Aunt Virgie. She has tried to warn Grandpa, but he won't listen. Of course, she loves Grandpa very, very much, and he's always kind to her; and she says if I didn't look like Mother, he would love me just as much as he does Howard. But I'm glad I look like Mother, and I hope I'll grow more and more like her every day. I'm going to show you her picture when you come over to our house. O Mary! maybe you might meet her some day in New York or some other place you happen to visit. And you can tell her about me, and how I long for her every day, and how I say the prayers she taught me—*The Lord's Prayer* and *Now I Lay Me Down to Sleep*—those are all I remember. And you will write to me and tell me where she is and if she is comfortable, and—and—Mary, I would go to her! I would! I *would!* I could wear her old clothes just as well as Aunt Virgie's, and I could wash dishes and dust and do lots of things to help pay my board where she is living. Will you do that for me, Mary?"

"Of course I shall, Bab. Even before you asked me, I was wondering whether I might meet her some day. And I shall tell Father and Mother and Uncle Frank about her, too."

"O Mary! I'm so glad I told you. I thought it might sound queer for me to talk like this to you the very first time I met you; but there's another reason besides Mother why I've told you so much. I want you to understand from the very beginning that we're poor—plain, poverty poor; and now if you don't want to play with me—"

"Bab! The very idea! What difference does it make whether a person is rich or poor?"

"Hm! It makes a whole lot of difference if you happen to be the poor one."

"Yes, as far as clothes and such things go; but we were talking about being friends. Why, at Maryvale there are over two hundred boarders, and Wilhelmina and I never stop to think whether they are rich or poor. Surely, that isn't what a person ought to think of when she is making friends."

"I'm mighty glad you look at it that way, and that you're not one of the stuckup kind, going around with your nose in the air."

Mary was puzzled. She could not blind herself to the fact that she had always had a more beautiful home, better clothes, more costly toys than many of her little companions; but why this should cause her to go around with her nose in the air was more than she could understand. It had rather always seemed to her a reason why she should share everything that could be shared with those who had less. So she was glad when the

conversation was interrupted by the return of the twins with their boats.

"We had the most drefful time finding Eben-easy, and we were so 'fraid Bab would go home before she saw our beauty boats. See, Bab, Beth's is blue, 'cause blue is her color; and mine is red, 'cause red is my color ev'y single time."

It was Bab's turn to look puzzled.

"Berta means that she is dedicated to the Sacred Heart, and Beth to our Blessed Mother. I shall explain what that means some other time, Bab. There is Mother, looking for us."

Bab promised to come over early in the morning to help sail the boats on the duck pond, and went home happy in the possession of a friend to whom faded pinafores made no difference. And Mary, whose keenest sympathy had been aroused by her sad story, resolved to wear the plainest dress she had whenever she expected a visit from Bab.

It was she who told a story that evening after the twins had been put to bed, and she had taken her place between her father and mother before the big fireplace.

"So that is how matters stand, is it? From what the Doctor said, I inferred that both parents were dead."

"He probably thinks they are, Rob. The mother must have been a frail woman, who could scarcely have lived long if exposed to hardship even with-

out the additional heart hunger for her little ones."

"I knew that Doctor Wren was a man bound hand and foot by old traditions; but I hardly believed him capable of such heartlessness."

"Father, don't you think we could find out something about Bab's mother? I know exactly how poor Bab must feel. It would be a relief to her even to be sure her mother is dead, and not sick and poor and cold and hungry. Her name was Estelle Lewis. That is why Bab chose Estelle for one of her names; but of course she shouldn't have said it before her grandfather. It slipped from her before she knew it. I suppose she had bread and milk for her supper after that. Don't you think the people at that hospital would know something about her mother? She would surely have left some address with them in case the Doctor might be sorry and wish to tell her to come back to her children. Poor Bab is so anxious, too, to go to school with other girls. I do wish she could come to Maryvale."

"I think I can easily arrange that, Mary. I have decided to give a scholarship to Maryvale as a little thank offering for all the favors we have received; and Doctor Wren cannot reasonably object to Bab's being the first to benefit by it, especially when I put it to him in this way—that I am paying only a little of the debt which I have owed him for the past twenty years. My

mother was an invalid for a long time before her death, and Doctor Wren attended her most faithfully. He became highly indignant whenever my father asked him for his bill; for he thought that the friendship which had existed for generations between the two families should do away with the idea of compensation for any service which one might render the other. But now is my chance to balance our account."

"Father! Oh, will you ask him about it before we go back to Bird-a-Lea?"

"Yes, I shall arrange it all as soon as an opportunity presents itself; but not a word to Bab until everything is settled. As for instituting a search for the mother, the next time I go to Richmond, I shall inquire at the hospital to see what chance of success there is. She may have returned to the North—to New York, perhaps, where so many in her circumstances go; and if her health continued poor, inquiries at the various hospitals there might bring results. We shall interest Uncle in the case."

CHAPTER XIX

A DOUBLE SURPRISE

"There goes the carriage around to the barn. Where in the world has Pompey been so early in the morning. If I didn't know that the train gets in at six in the evening, I would think he had gone to meet Uncle and Aunt Mandy." As Mary turned to finish her breakfast, a loud, clear voice resounded through the hall.

"'You can't get 'em up,
You can't get 'em up,
You can't get 'em up in the morning,
You can't get 'em up,
You can't get 'em up,
You can't get 'em up at all.'"

Mary jumped up from the table and made for the door with the twins at her heels and her father and mother, laughing at the success of their surprise, not far behind.

"But, Father, I thought there was only one passenger train a day stopping here," remonstrated the little girl when the greetings were over.

"Only one from the direction in which we came. You forgot that Uncle was coming from New York."

"And Aunt Mandy, Uncle? didn't you bring her after all?"

"Indeed I did, Goldilocks! She is in the library

looking after a little surprise I brought you. One moment, little folks!" For the twins had again started for the door. "Mary will send her to you. My surprise is not equal to too much excitement."

Mary was puzzled. A surprise not equal to excitement! Well, she could soon satisfy her curiosity; and down the length of the hall she sped. At the library door she encountered Aunt Mandy and gave her a welcoming hug.

"An' whah's ma oddah li'l bressed lambs, honey chile? Ma heart's most ate up wif lonesome fo' dem."

"There they are, waiting for you at the dining-room door. What did Uncle bring me, Aunt Mandy?" But the old nurse had already started forward to meet the little ones, who were racing toward her. Mary stood in the doorway watching them until she heard her name called in a weak voice. Whirling about, she ran across the room to the big leather couch. "O Florence, *Florence!* Isn't this the loveliest surprise ever was!" And the two little girls clung to each other until Florence fell back exhausted. Then Mary noticed the great change in her little friend, but thought it largely due to the long, tiresome journey. "You are simply worn out, Florence; but after a few days here where it is so warm and bright and sunny, you will be as well as ever. Oh, I'm so glad Uncle brought you with him. Just see how well I look!"

"And I thought they were taking you away to die, and that I would never see you again. O Mary! has anyone told you? do you know that I am going to be a Catholic as soon as I learn a little more?"

"Florence! You *are*! Oh, I never dreamed of such a thing!"

"Neither did I until after you went away. I was so, so lonely, Mary. Then I remembered how you always felt toward our Blessed Mother when you thought your father and mother and the twins were dead; and I began to wonder whether she loved me, too, and I asked Mother Madeline about that and some other things that puzzled me; and when she had explained them all I saw that I really ought to be a Catholic. Father Hartley has been instructing me; and I was afraid if I came down here he wouldn't baptize me at Easter as he has promised to do. But he said he was sure your mother would teach me anything else I should know—"

"And she will, Florence, she will! Here she is now, trying her best to look surprised, when she has known all along that you were coming."

Mrs. Selwyn was followed by Scip, carrying a dainty breakfast.

"I shall stay with Florence, Mary, while you finish your breakfast. Then we must let her have a long sleep. I am afraid the journey has been too much for her."

"And she must have my room, Mother, because

it is the only one upstairs with long windows opening out on a porch. That porch over the carriage entrance is sunny all day long, and Florence can sit out there in a big chair until she is rested and able to come downstairs."

Mary re-entered the dining-room just in time to hear her Uncle say that he must return to New York Sunday night.

"And to-day is Friday. Why, Uncle! we thought you would stay at least two weeks, and we have planned all sorts of good times."

"I shall run down again later on, dear, when I hope to be able to take a longer holiday. But we can begin at once to carry out a few of your plans. Mention some of them."

"One is that we shall go for a long ride every day. Oh, you needn't laugh, Uncle. All the horses are not like 'dem frisky grays,' that Pomp insists on driving. We shall have to start at midnight to get to the next town in time for Mass Sunday, unless Father can make him drive the other team; though perhaps they are no better than the grays. But there are some good saddle horses."

"Then let us take our first ride this morning. How will eleven o'clock suit you? That will give me time to answer most of Mother's questions, and you can keep yours for our ride."

During the Doctor's visit, the little girl scarcely left his side, for her mother would not allow her to spend more than a few minutes at a time with

Florence, who was exhausted from the journey. After her uncle's departure, she was much disappointed that the bright spring days went by without bringing her little friend the strength to join in the lively games that went on under the big, old trees. True, Mr. Selwyn carried Florence downstairs to the east end of the veranda every morning, where Mary or her mother read and talked to her; and once or twice he took her and Mary and Bab for a little drive, which, however, proved too much for her. She was "just tired," and was perfectly content to lie on a wicker couch on the veranda, watching the children at play or listening to the instructions which Mrs. Selwyn faithfully gave her.

But Mary could not understand why the fresh air and sunshine, which had done so much for her, did not have an equally good effect on Florence. However, she decided that it was merely a matter of time; and her father and mother, who soon realized that the little invalid had gone beyond the point where she could be benefited, thought it better for the time being, at least, to let Mary hold her own opinion on the matter. It was only a forlorn hope, as Doctor Carlton explained to Mr. and Mrs. Selwyn, that had led him to bring Florence to Cedar Ridge. He had seen her failing steadily; and all that Doctor Saunders and the Sisters had done for her had availed nothing. Never very strong, her heart had been so weak-

ened by her long illness that it was merely a question of how long it would hold out. Mrs. Selwyn sometimes wondered whether the little girl realized that she could not recover. She often caught a wistful light in the big, gray eyes—larger and more serious looking than ever—fixed on Mary and Bab playing tennis. For such times Mrs. Selwyn always had an unusually interesting story; or on some pretext or other she would call the children up on the veranda where she turned the conversation to subjects interesting to Florence.

At first Bab rather resented Florence's coming. She had counted on having Mary very much to herself. But it was not long before the gentle little invalid won her affection; and she seldom came to Cedar Ridge without a great bouquet of violets, trailing arbutus, and dogwood blossoms, having risen a whole hour earlier to gather them. One morning a week or so after Florence's arrival, Doctor Wren set out to visit a patient at a distance. This meant no lessons for Bab that day; and having put her own room in order, she gladly availed herself of her aunt's permission to dispense with her dusting and mending and spend the whole day at Cedar Ridge. Down the road, across the little bridge, and up the steep hill she flew; for this had always been the short cut between the two homes. She saw the twins enjoying themselves down at the swing, but no sign of Mary; and on reaching the veranda she was told

by Mrs. Selwyn that Mary had that morning begun her studies with her father. Bab dropped on the top step to wait; and presently she found herself listening to every word of the instruction which Mrs. Selwyn was giving Florence. She was almost disappointed when Mary soon appeared and proposed a game of tennis. "I knew you were out here, Bab, but I didn't like to ask Father to let me off the very first morning. He just happened to look out the window and see you; and he says that you so seldom get a holiday that he thinks we ought to make use of every minute of it. So I had only a half hour of lessons instead of the hour we had planned."

Very often during the weeks that followed, Bab slipped away from Mary and her little sisters and returned to the veranda to rest, as she said, though in reality she longed to hear more on the subjects which Mary's mother discussed with Florence. Mrs. Selwyn had no idea that Bab was paying the least attention to what was being said as she sat on the step, leaning against the big fluted column and smiling at the antics of the twins, until one day she laid her little brown hand on Mrs. Selwyn's knee and asked earnestly, "Will you please say that again, Mrs. Selwyn?" Without showing any sign of the surprise she felt, Mrs. Selwyn repeated the words, "There shall be one Fold and one Shepherd," and went on instructing Florence as if there had been no interruption. But the little

invalid was quick to note that she took more pains to make matters very, very clear and simple than she would have done had Bab not asked the question; for Florence had been present at so many instructions at Maryvale that she needed little in the way of explanation. Mrs. Selwyn hoped that this might be the beginning of better things for Bab; that the little girl would in time learn where to turn for the comfort and strength she sorely needed.

The family had expected to return to Bird-a-Lea for Easter; but Doctor Carlton feared that the weather was still too unsettled and decided to take his promised vacation at that time. The shadow of disappointment in Florence's eyes when she heard of this change of plans did not escape Mrs. Selwyn, who remembered that Father Hartley had promised to receive the little girl into the Church at Easter. She proposed writing to him to ask whether he would not be willing that the priest in the neighboring town should baptize her. But though the little girl made no objection to this plan, Mrs. Selwyn could see that she was not wholly satisfied. She had set her heart on being baptized at Maryvale, which, since her grandmother's death, she had looked upon as home; and on the night after the letter had been sent to Father Hartley, when Mrs. Selwyn stopped in Florence's room to see that she needed nothing, the little girl whispered, "Please don't think that

I am not happy here, Aunt Elizabeth;" for so Mary had insisted that she call Mrs. Selwyn; "but—but sometimes I think that maybe God is going to take me away soon, and—and it would be so nice to be home where the chapel is; that's all."

Mrs. Selwyn lay awake far into the night, planning how to send the little girl "home." The next morning she consulted her husband, who promptly agreed to her suggestion that they themselves take Florence to Richmond and there engage a nurse to look after her for the remainder of the journey. The child's delight when told of this arrangement showed how great her longing had been; and on the following morning Mary kissed her good-bye, promising to be her godmother by proxy.

Mary could scarcely wait for the return of her parents, who, while in Richmond, were to visit the hospital in which Bab's mother had been so ill. But a great disappointment was in store for the little girl. A fire, five years before, had destroyed the part of the building in which the offices were located, and several books of records, which had been taken from the safe and were being used at the time, had been burned. The office force had been completely changed since that time. If Mrs. Wren had left any address, it must have been destroyed by the fire, and no mail had since come to the hospital for her. Even if any of the old force or of the nurses who had been in attendance there

could be interviewed, they would scarcely remember an address. The doctor gave it as his opinion that it was hardly probable that anyone so frail could still be alive. She had told him that she intended to place her children with her husband's relatives and go to New York herself.

"We shall ask Uncle Frank to make inquiries at the hospitals in New York, though perhaps she may never have been in any of them. Without knowing what name she chose, it will be a very difficult matter to trace her; but the thought occurred to me that if ill in a hospital she might have been delirious and talked of Harold and Bab. Still, unless that happened recently, the nurse who took care of her may be no longer in that particular hospital. It really seems a hopeless case. The needle in the haystack is nothing compared to it; for if the needle is there, a patient searcher stands a chance of finding it."

"Couldn't you put a notice in the New York papers, Father?"

"I have thought of that, Mary; but I know that Doctor Wren has many friends in New York, any of whom might send him the newspaper clipping. In that case the Doctor would suspect us, and we should lose our opportunity of doing anything for Bab. After the difficulty I had in persuading him to accept the scholarship for her, I should not care to risk the child's certain good for a mere possibility of locating the mother."

"But wouldn't it be possible, Rob, to word a message so that it would be understood by Mrs. Wren alone?"

"Perhaps we can do that, Elizabeth. She has pledged herself to give up all claim to the children; but that should not prevent her hearing of them occasionally. The fact that she has made no attempt to do so is almost conclusive proof that she is dead. Don't you think so?"

"Unless she has some mistaken idea that she would be false to her promise by doing so, Rob. Or she may think that the Doctor would resent any such attempt and retaliate by being unkind to the children."

"Yes, that may be her reason for this long silence. Well, we shall do our best, but I have no hope of succeeding."

"But, Father, think how hopeless we felt about Mother. Everyone was positive that she was dead, and I had nothing but what Berta told me about seeing her and Beth go down in the little boat and my own feeling that she was alive somewhere to make me think a mistake had been made. I had no idea whether she was in Europe, Asia, or Africa, or right in the United States; but I knew that if I prayed hard enough, our Blessed Mother would help us find her. And why wouldn't she do the same for Bab? The twenty-sixth of April is the Feast of Our Lady of Good Counsel. Let us make a novena; and I shall ask Aunt Mary to have

all the Sisters and girls make it, too. Every evening we shall sing that hymn to our Lady of Good Counsel—the one that says, ‘Mother, tell me what am I to do,’ at the end of each verse; and then let us say the Rosary together and the *Memorare*. And you will see that everything will come out all right for Bab; and maybe she will become a Catholic when she sees what prayer to our Blessed Mother has done for her.”

“You are right, little daughter. Prayer will be of more avail than detectives; though they may prove useful, too.”

“Oh, of course, Father. Father Hartley always says that we must use human means, too, because God expects us to do that. People who just sit down and wait for Him to work miracles for them and who won’t do a thing to help out, can’t expect their prayers to be heard. In Mother’s case, Uncle had done everything he could think of to make sure that she and Beth had been lost in the wreck; and even after he met the boy who had been in the lifeboat with them, he didn’t just wait until we got to Lourdes to pray that we would find them; but he put detectives on the case and visited that hospital at Bordeaux, where the boy said Mother had been taken when she was so sick; and he had my picture taken because I look like her, and—and oh, everything he could think of! There wasn’t anything for me to do but to pray and ask others to do the same—”

"How about all those penitential exercises which you practiced?" Mr. Selwyn's eyes twinkled, and Mary laughed heartily.

"Did Uncle tell you about them, Father? and how Berta gave me away? Yes, I had heard Sister Austin say that if we mortify ourselves as well as pray, we stand a better chance of getting what we want; so I did without candy and dessert, and stayed up later than I should have done at night praying, and I went oftener to the chapel, and I think I read my prayer book, Penitential Psalms and all, about a thousand times, and said the Stations three times a day, and I don't remember what else I did before Berta told Uncle that I wouldn't play with her and spent all my free time in the chapel. He said it was no wonder that I was pale and thin, and he was really provoked at me. But Aunt Mary fixed it all up with him, and I got what I wanted, anyway!" Mary seized her mother's hand and kissed it passionately.

"So you did, dear; and we shall begin to pray that Bab's case will turn out as beautifully as ours did. I hope, though, that you have not spoken to her of what we are trying to do."

"No, indeed, Mother; but you can't imagine how hard it is not to say something about it when she talks of her mother."

After Florence's departure, Mary settled down in earnest to the writing of the story, which, to Wilhelmina's disappointment, she had more or less

neglected. Every day after luncheon while the rest of the family were enjoying their siesta, she slipped up to the attic and filled page after page with an account of her little sisters' pranks which she had witnessed herself or heard of from her mother, the old nurse, and others. When she had finished a chapter, she copied it carefully and placed the neatly written pages between the stiff covers of the large note book. Then she sent the rough copy to Wilhelmina and waited with as much patience as she could command for the arrival of her drawings. Mrs. Selwyn sometimes came up to see how the story was progressing and was always glad of an opportunity to laugh heartily at something Mary had written; for the sight of the serious little girl almost lost in the great, high-backed chair before the massive old desk strewn with manuscript, was decidedly amusing.

If there was one article of furniture in the house which Mary loved more than another, it was that desk; and she often wondered how she could ever again accommodate herself to her own little up-to-date writing desk in her room at Bird-a-Lea. "It does very well, you know, for letters and such things, Mother; but for a book—well, you can see for yourself that I can't keep the pages on even this great big desk. They are always flying all over the floor no matter how much I try to keep them in order."

"That is just one of the little trials an author must put up with, dear."

"An author, Mother! Dear, me! I hope you don't think I imagine I'm an author!"

"But 'Coming events cast their shadows before.' And who knows to what this first attempt at writing and illustrating a story may lead? I wish you would let me tell Father about your book."

"I wouldn't mind one bit, Mother, because I know he would keep the secret. But Wilhelmina won't listen to such a thing. She didn't like it very well because I told you."

"Perhaps after she has seen what a creditable piece of work you are both producing, she may change her mind about keeping it such a profound secret."

CHAPTER XX

PHIL'S SCRAPE

“Howdy, Mary!”

At sound of the familiar voice, Mary dropped her book with a cry of glad surprise and ran down the steps to meet the tall boy coming up the driveway. “Phil! where *did* you come from?”

“Straight from the poky little station in your sleepy old village along the hottest, dustiest road I have ever tramped.” And Phil Marvin gave the two little hands outstretched to welcome him a hearty shake.

“But why didn’t you let us know you were coming so we could meet you?”

“I tried my level best to do just that, Mary; first by telephone——”

Mary laughed. “We haven’t any, Phil. Oh, we are *away* behind the times down here! But Father has sent word to the company, and I suppose the men will come to put it in when we are packing to go North again. Cedar Ridge is not New York City, nor even Sunnymead or Bird-a-Lea, as I have good reason to know; but just the same, I love it.”

“It surely is some place all right, Mary. But to finish answering your question——when I couldn’t get you on the ‘phone, I sent a telegram. Here it is. I saw it on the desk when I asked the operator where I could get a rig to drive out here.”

“What a shame!”

"Well, I suppose he wasn't altogether to blame. He said he couldn't find anyone to deliver it. There is something going on to-day in the next town, and the village is absolutely deserted. We couldn't find a thing on wheels to bring us out here."

"Us! Are Harry and Joe coming, too?"

"They are if we can find some way of getting them here. Joe twisted his ankle yesterday and can hardly stand on it. So Harry stayed with him in the station while I came on ahead to announce our arrival. If you can let me have a horse and rig of some sort, I shall go right back for them. That station is hot as blazes."

"I know it is, Phil. We must get them out of it right away. But——let me think what there is for you to take. Father and Mother have gone in the carriage to spend the afternoon and take dinner with friends ten miles away. The older carriages are not safe; and just wait until you see the coach, Phil! If it were only fit to use, we could have lots of fun dressing up in the old-timey things up in the attic and going to meet the boys that way. There isn't a thing but the big farm wagons and the little old phaeton which is just large enough for two. Oh, I know! Tobe! Come here, Tobe! Yes, I saw you peeping around the corner there. Come here a minute!"

The little black boy reluctantly made his appearance.

"You sometimes drive to the village for the mail, don't you, Tobe?"

"Ah suttinly does, Miss May-ree. Ain't Ah done tole yo'all's dat's how Ah cotched de hookin'-coffs dat time agwine t' dat village an' 'soshatin' wif de poah white trash what's ben acomin' in dah lately?"

"Well, Tobe, there's no one in the village to-day for you to catch anything from; but there are some guests at the station, and someone must drive in for them. I thought you could take the phaeton for them and another horse for you to ride back."

"Whoopee, Miss May-ree! Ah kin do dat all right 'nuff fo' sho'!"

"And how long is it going to take you to hitch up?"

"Ah's gwine drike out'n heah in two shakes ob a daid keow's tail, Miss May-ree. Jes' yo' watch dis yeah niggah!"

"That will be better, Phil, than to have you go all the way back in the hot sun. Come up on the porch and make yourself comfortable. I shall get you something cool to drink."

Mary soon returned with a big pitcher of lemonade; and when Phil had satisfied his thirst, she demanded, "Now, tell me what is the matter."

"Why, who said there is anything the matter, Mary?"

"Hm! as if it isn't written all over your face. Even if I couldn't see that you are worried,

wouldn't a visit from you just now be enough to set me guessing? The Easter holidays don't begin until next week. Oh, I do hope there is nothing wrong at Sunnymead! No one sick or hurt, I mean."

"No, no, Mary, everything is all right there. But it takes yourself to see through a fellow. I was flattering myself that you hadn't noticed a thing. You are not so easily bluffed as Willie is."

"But Wilhelmina isn't easily bluffed, Phil. She sees a great deal more than anyone thinks she does, but she doesn't always pretend to notice."

"Well, don't imagine that I am going to burden you with my troubles. I shall wait and talk things over with Uncle Rob. How soon will he be home?"

"Not before nine or half past, Phil. The horses down here take their time just as every one does. So don't you think you would feel better if you told me what the trouble is? I suppose there isn't really anything I can do to help you out of it; but I know things never seem quite so bad after I have talked them over with someone. Is it something that must be attended to right away?"

"No, Mary, nothing can be done about it until Father comes——"

"Oh, is Uncle Phil coming? and will he bring Wilhelmina?"

"Father said he would meet us here; but it isn't likely that he will bring Willie with him." The troubled shadows in the boy's dark eyes deepened

as he gazed over the bright green fields to the hills beyond. For a moment he forgot the little girl in the big chair opposite, and hard lines appeared around his mouth. Mary watched him anxiously. Suddenly he remembered that he was not alone.

"Oh, I say, Mary, *you* mustn't worry about it!"

"But I can't help feeling anxious, Phil. It must be something dreadful when it makes you look as you did a minute ago. And you're so far away from your father and mother and—"

"How did I look?"

"Desperate."

"Oh, it isn't quite so bad as that." The boy forced a smile and tried to speak lightly. "Perhaps I *had* better tell you all about it. You will hear it to-morrow anyway. I've been fired!"

"Fired! *You* fired! Expelled from school!" And to Phil's surprise, Mary leaned back in her chair, laughing heartily. "Well, that's the best joke I've heard in a long time, Phil. What sort of school is it, I should like to know, to expel a Marvin?" Her mirth gave place to indignation. "Oh, just wait until Father hears this! The school my grandfather helped to found firing boys who couldn't do a mean thing if they tried!"

Phil flushed and laughingly protested. "Don't be too sure of that, Mary. We all have the Marvin temper, you know."

"Hm! I haven't seen very much of it, so you must manage to hold it in pretty well."

"We have been taught to do that since we were babies. But we have it all right. Father is a wonderful example to us. You will hardly believe that I have seen him positively white with rage—you may know things are pretty bad when any of us Indians get white—but he never opened his lips; just went off some place by himself until he had conquered his anger. An uncle of his almost killed a man who had enraged him; so Father has taken good care to impress on us the danger of giving way to our 'mad'."

"But I can't believe your 'mad' has made you do anything that you could be expelled for, Phil."

"No, Mary, I'm thankful to say it has not—at least, not directly. But I shall have to go back to the first few days after Father left us at this wonderful school that we tormented him into letting us attend. We weren't there an hour before Harry and I saw that we were in the wrong place; but we were too proud to admit it when Father came to say good-bye the next morning, and made up our minds to stick it out for the rest of the year. Well, we stood things as best we could until an ignorant chap said something about our Blessed Mother. I simply knocked him flat; and before I got through with him, he was minus two front teeth, and his beauty was pretty generally spoiled."

Instead of looking horrified, as Phil expected his dainty little listener to do, she clapped her hands enthusiastically. "Oh, that was splendid, Phil, splendid!"

He stared at her in utter amazement.

"Why, don't you see? You were our Lady's knight. In olden times knights fought for the honor of the ladies they loved; and isn't that exactly what you did? How I wish I had been there to help you! But," examining her hands ruefully, "I'm afraid I wouldn't have been much good. Do you think I shall *ever* be able to pound anyone that way, Phil?"

"I hope you will never have to do it, Mary. It isn't a pleasant job by any means, and takes more muscle than you are ever likely to have."

Mary heaved a disappointed sigh. "Dear, me! It must be wonderful to be so strong and fine!"

"Well, the president of the college didn't seem to think I had done anything particularly chivalrous. He threatened to fire me if I did it again; but I told him respectfully, but very plainly, that if anyone talked in that fashion while I was around, I had no choice but to do it again. After that the chap I thrashed—and, by the way, he looks as much like me as Joe does—never missed a chance to be mean. He was afraid to come out in the open; but he was up to all sorts of tricks, and, on account of the strong resemblance between us, managed them so that the blame fell on me. And I had the dickens of a time trying to prove my innocence to the different professors who called me to time. You see, Claude's father is one of the directors of the college.

"Things went on from bad to worse until yesterday afternoon. I had a ripping headache—got hit in the head with a baseball—and about five o'clock I went to my room. It was beastly hot, so I threw up the window and pushed a big, high-backed chair in front of it and sat with my back to the door. I didn't go down to supper; and a few minutes after the bell had rung, an auto came up the road, and I watched it until it stopped behind the wall at the end of the college grounds. A second later, Claude, my double, ran from behind some shrubs and scrambled over the wall. He knew he was safe in doing it, because that side of the building is deserted while the boys are at supper. Then the auto went spinning back along the road toward town. After a little I fell asleep, and didn't wake until eleven o'clock. Lights are supposed to be out at ten; so I went to bed by moonlight. First thing this morning, Harry asked me where I was last evening. The professor who keeps evening study hour missed me and sent him to look for me. I went to explain to the professor, but he said the president had just sent word that he wished to see me. Then I knew something was up. I went to his office and found him talking to a policeman. He asked the officer if I was the boy. The officer said I was. Then he pointed to a little pocket notebook and a fountain pen lying on the desk, and said that he presumed they were mine as they bore my name. I immediately claimed

them, saying that I was glad to get them back; that they had been taken from my desk two or three days before. The two of them smiled in a 'know it all' fashion, and I knew something was coming. The president hemmed and hawed and then began: 'This officer rightly considers the Dew Drop Inn no place for the young gentlemen of this college.' I had heard that it was the lowest of the low down gambling holes in the town; and I tell you, Mary, my 'mad' began to come up in good earnest when I thought that my name was being connected with such a foul place. The president went on: 'These articles, which you do not hesitate to claim, were found under the table where you and your boon companions sat last evening, regaling yourselves on stuff that no decent boy would touch, until you had to be literally carried out of the place. Any attempt on your part to deny these charges will be useless. You were not in the building last evening. Your own brother could not find you in your room. This officer recognized you as soon as you entered the room. No further proof is necessary to convince me of your guilt. Your record here has been most unsatisfactory. I have therefore decided to make an example of you and to expel you publicly. The honor of the institution must be upheld.'

"Well, Mary, you can judge for yourself that I wasn't exactly an icicle by that time. How I ever kept still, I don't know; but from past experience

I did know that it would be absolutely foolish for me to try to clear myself; so I turned on my heel and left the room. I went straight to the telephone to call Father. Fortunately, he was in the house. If I had had to wait for him to come in from the fields, I think the president would have tried to prevent my telling him anything; because, a few minutes after I had left his august presence, he followed me to make sure, I suppose, that I would not try to escape. He came along just as I began talking to Father. I simply said that I was about to be publicly expelled, that I had done absolutely nothing to deserve it, and asked what he wished Harry and Joe to do. I knew from his voice that he was making a desperate attempt to keep *his* 'mad' down. All he said was, 'Ask the president to step to the 'phone. I shall speak to you again after I have finished with him.' And maybe I couldn't see that finish! The president wasn't any too keen to take the receiver; and gee whilikins, Mary! I could hear every word Father said half way across the room. 'If you attempt—*attempt*, sir, to expel a son of mine publicly, privately, or in any other way whatever, I will bring suit against you and the institution over which you preside for every cent you and it are worth; and I will see to it that you are exposed before the public in your true colors.' You see, Mary, Father had heard things from others and had some idea of what we had been going through; but he wouldn't pretend anything to us

when he wrote. We had teased and teased to go to that school, and he was going to let us do our own asking about leaving it. But about his talk with the president. I heard him say, 'I shall call on you in person before the end of the week. Meanwhile, let there be no obstacle placed in the way of my son's carrying out my instructions concerning himself and his brothers, which I shall now give him.' The president didn't have a chance to open his mouth. When he tried to explain, Father insisted on speaking to me again. He told me that he couldn't leave home until to-morrow; but for us to come here at once. I tell you what, Mary, it's pretty tough on a fellow when he tries to do the square thing by everybody and then gets knocked into a hole like this. Father won't be able to change that man one bit. Oh, yes, he may save me from being publicly expelled; but the news that I was really fired will spread in spite of all the law suits in creation. And think what it will mean for the rest of the boys! No matter where they go to school, they will bump up against someone contemptible enough to fling at them, 'Marvin? Oh, yes, your brother was expelled from college for making a beast of himself in a gambling den.' A nice reputation, isn't it, for the eldest son of the family!" The boy leaned forward, his elbows on his knees, his face in his hands.

"Well, Phil, I'm ashamed of you! Where is your faith?"

"Faith, Mary? what has faith to do with it?" His puzzled gaze met Mary's reproving eyes. "Oh, you mean faith in Father?"

"No, I don't, Phil."

"You surely don't mean faith in that bunch who are running that school! Ye gods! A fellow would be an idiot to place any faith in them! Imagine! Just because Claude's father is on the board of directors, his son's antics are winked at, and he is allowed to go his own way to ruination. Nixie! Don't ask me to place any faith in such people, Mary."

"I couldn't ask you even to try to do such a thing, Phil. But you are certainly forgetting the very one you ought to have most faith in next to God Himself. Here you are in a terrible scrape because you took our Blessed Mother's part—yes, that was the beginning of all the trouble, Phil—and do you think for one instant that she isn't going to get you out of it? Why, you know our Lord can't refuse her anything. Uncle Phil will certainly do all he can, you may be sure; and as for that Claude's father being on the board of directors—well, I guess the son of one of the founders of that college ought to have as much to say as a director. Yes, my grandfather helped to found it; and perhaps someone higher up than Phil Marvin will be fired when Father makes a

speech at the next meeting of the board. But our Blessed Mother will be back of it all—why, I do believe it was through her that you came here so that Father can go with Uncle Phil to that old college and tell that president what he thinks of him. Oh, you will be surprised to see how everything will turn out!"

The boy gazed at the flushed little face opposite him. "You're right as usual, Mary, and you have no idea of the load you have lifted off my mind. Hello, there!" For the twins had just come out on the porch.

"Oh! Oh! It's Phil! Goody, goody, good-ee!"

CHAPTER XXI.

“I TOLD YOU SO.”

When the greetings were over, Phil inquired, “But what has become of ‘does you’ and ‘we has’?”

“Oh, Beth and I thinked—I mean *thought* we must ‘prove ourselfs and stop talking baby way same as we did a long, long time ago when we went to your house.’” And the twins gave an animated account of the private lessons in the arbor at Sunnymead. Before they had finished, Harry and Joe drove up, and it was a difficult matter to assure the little ones that Wilhelmina and the rest of the family were not expected and to persuade them to go in to dinner. Immediately after that meal, Aunt Mandy took Joe in hand and bathed and bandaged the injured ankle with such good results that the boy thought himself quite equal to joining his brothers the following morning when Mr. Selwyn offered to show them over the place. But Mrs. Selwyn urged him to rest his foot for another day. Then Berta thought of a plan.

“Mother, I know the very ’zact thing! The cute little tricycle in the attic! Joe can ride in it, and Beth and I can pull him ev’y place he likes to go.”

“Oh, I say, Berta, isn’t there a baby carriage up there?”

“N—no, Joe, I never did see nenny baby carriage up there, not ever, ever at all. Did you, Beth?”

“Not ever, ever at all, Berta; but they’s a cradle.”

The boys shouted.

“Thanks just the same, Beth; but I think I shall stay here on the porch and read—unless you and Berta will keep me company.”

“In course we will, Joe.” And the two entertained the boy until the others returned.

The following morning Mr. Marvin arrived; and after hearing Phil’s story, he and Mr. Selwyn set out with the boy for the college. Two days later Mary received the following letter:

Dear Mary,

Uncle Rob expects to go to Richmond, where he will be detained for two or three days; and as I think you ought to know at once how everything has turned out here, I am going to tell you.

You should have been here for the finish; though I have an idea that we haven’t seen the end of things yet—that is, as far as the faculty of the college are concerned. But to begin at the beginning, as I know you want me to do. We arrived last evening, and Father and Uncle Rob took a stroll about town. They thought it better

for me not to go with them as I might run across someone from the college; but I had my suspicions that they wished to see what sort of place I was accused of patronizing, and I was not mistaken. They came back to the hotel simply raging. This morning Father and I took a taxi out to the school. Uncle Rob said he would be along later. The president was not overjoyed to see us. Father listened very sweetly while he insisted that he had pursued the only course open to him; that one in his position is bound to see that the honor of the institution is upheld. And right there Father demanded, "By whom? by a low down sneak and thief, who would steal articles bearing the name of the innocent and conveniently lose them so as to throw the blame on him? by an unjust staff, who will not dare inquire into the truth for fear of having to punish the real culprit? You know, and every professor here knows that there is a boy here who could not resemble my son more if he were his brother; that his record is scandalous; that my son has been blamed time and again for his misdemeanors. I am not saying that he is guilty of the charges you have brought against my son in this present instance; but I ask you where *he* was from supper and study that evening? was anyone sent to *his* room after him? was *he* in the building?"

Just then a taxi drove up, and Father told me

to go into the next room where I wouldn't be seen; but he didn't tell me I was not to see; and I saw Uncle Rob enter the office, followed by my officer friend. You should have seen the president's face when Uncle Rob was introduced. Father laid it on thick. “Mr. Robert Selwyn, son of the late Colonel Robert Selwyn of Cedar Ridge.” The president recognized him all right. Then, without mentioning his name, Father asked to have the other chap brought in. The president objected; but Father declared that he would go through the school himself and find him; and the officer, who really didn't know exactly what he had been brought there for, backed him up. Say, Mary, I honestly felt sorry for Claude when he walked into that room and saw who were there. He had thought himself safe since I had been blamed and had taken myself off without any fuss; and he had no idea until he saw the policeman why he had been sent for. From the minute he caught sight of the officer, his face was a dead giveaway. Father asked the officer, “Do you still say that this is the boy, etc., etc.?” And the policeman insisted that Claude was the boy. Then, without saying my name, Father called me in, and the officer was almost stunned. He simply couldn't for the life of him tell which was the guilty one. At last he remembered that the boy he had helped to carry out to the auto had a scar near the

temple. That settled matters, for my beauty is marred by no such scar. Claude saw that the game was up; but the president began to try to shield him. Then Uncle Rob very quietly assured him that he was already guilty enough of frustrating the intentions of your grandfather and those others who founded the college and who believed in fair play for all regardless of rank, wealth, or station, and that he would do well to see that absolute justice was done in this case at least.

Then Father made the president assemble the whole school—faculty, pupils, servants and all—and he cleared the name of Marvin of all the charges which had been brought against it in the person of your humble servant. Claude had to admit everything before them all, and the president couldn't do anything else but expel him publicly.

Time to say, “I told you so!” and I am perfectly willing that you say it and rub it in well every time we meet from henceforth, now, and forevermore. We leave for Richmond early in the morning. Father is writing to Harry and Joe to tell them where to meet us there. I hope they have been good little boys. After Easter we are going back to the good old college we should never have left. I have done my last coaxing for anything Father does not see fit to let us have or do.

Remember me to Aunt Elizabeth and the
twinnies.

Always your obejent servant,

PHILIP W. MARVIN.

P. S.—I shall wear blue and white neckties for
a year.—P. W. M.

CHAPTER XXII.

EBENEZER'S PERIL

Mary and Bab drove slowly up from the valley. It was a warm afternoon in Easter week, and the two little girls were glad when they turned in on the private road to Cedar Ridge. Mary had just finished telling Bab about Phil's scrape.

"They are the nicest boys I ever met, Mary. I wish the Marvins lived near here so Howard could go with them all the time. His friends are just horrid. They always treat me like a baby. I'm more anxious than ever to know Wilhelmina. Don't you think you could have her come here for a few days before you go away? She has to come as far as Richmond to meet you, anyway."

"I did my best to coax Uncle Phil to let her come, Bab; but he thinks she is already too far behind the class to break in again on her studies. I am even farther behind than she is, though Father has helped me nearly every day for some weeks. But he doesn't want me to spend very much time now studying, and says that he will arrange for me to take private lessons at the convent when we go back. By keeping them up for two or three weeks after school closes, he thinks I shall be able to go on with the class next year."

"And to think that I am to go to Maryville in September! Your father said that perhaps I can meet Wilhelmina at Richmond and travel the rest

of the way with her and whoever takes her back to school. That would save Aunt Virgie the long, expensive trip, though I would love to have her go all the way to see Maryvale. Poor Aunt Virgie! She's so happy over it all, though she says she will miss me dreadfully. And I just know she will work her fingers off to get me ready."

"But you don't need much in the way of clothes, Bab. The scholarship includes uniforms, school books, and all such things; and that white dress you wore Sunday will do nicely for entertainments."

"Mary! there's the most beautiful, white silk poplin in that trunk in the attic. If Aunt Virgie would only make it over for me, the girls would think I am a princess."

"But you wouldn't be allowed to wear it at Maryvale, Bab. The girls have to wear white wash dresses, even for graduation. You see, the Sisters don't want anyone who can't afford expensive clothes to feel bad if she isn't as well dressed as others are. That's why they insist on all the uniforms being made at Maryvale. In that way they are sure of having the same shade of blue, same material, and all."

"That's good! And to think that my wish is really coming true! Howard can't get over it. He doesn't believe that a girl needs to know anything except cooking and sewing and such things. Oh, I pity his wife if he ever gets one! I'm going

to work my head off in arithmetic even though I do hate it."

"Yes, we shall have ever so much more fun if we are all in the same class. You are away ahead of us in history and geography, so you can drop those for awhile."

"And at Maryville I'm going to study hard and have such good reports to send home that Grandpa will just have to be proud of me even though he doesn't love me. Howard's reports are simply awful. I know I'm terrible to talk this way about my own brother; but after meeting those Marvin boys and seeing how nice they are to each other and so respectful to their father, and then when I think how Howard acts toward Grandpa and Aunt Virgie when they're almost starving themselves trying to make a gentleman of him, I just boil! Mary! look at that poor old darkey! What ails him?"

They had just turned the bend in the drive and caught sight of Ebenezer some distance ahead. He was stumbling along toward the gates as fast as his age and feebleness would permit. At sound of the horse's hoofs, he tried to run, but fell heavily to the ground.

"Wait, Ebenezer, wait! We'll help you!" Mary whipped up the horse, and presently the two girls were at the old man's side trying to help him to his feet.

"'Tain't no use, nohow, Miss May-ree, 'tain't

no use! Mout as well let dem catch me heah as anywhahs else. Dey's gwine git me fo' sho', no-how!" He sank on his knees, wringing his hands and moaning piteously.

Mary was frightened. She thought the poor old man had suddenly lost his mind and wondered what she should do.

"De good Lawd knows Ah's alwuz tried to lib lak a 'spectable niggah, nebah doin' nobuddy no hahm. An' Ah sho'ly 'spected to die in ma bed lak a good Chris'un, 'stead ob hangin' by ma neck twell Ah's daid!"

Bab's eyes grew big with horror. "I'm going home, Mary! I'm going home!" And in spite of Mary's imploring, "O Bab, Bab! *don't* leave me! Please help me to get him up to the house, or go ask Uncle to come down here!" she was off through the gates and across the lawn toward the hill sloping to the little bridge over the stream.

"De Doctah ain't up to de house, Miss May-ree. Jes' as Ah wah sottin' out fo' de village, a fellah kem fo' him to go to de cross-roads whah he done say somebuddy's dyin' fo' sho'. He done say de doctah in de village am away, an' Doctah Wren am gone fo' de day, too." And Ebenezer began again to moan and wring his horny old hands. Mary knew that his last statement was true; but her heart sank at thought of the cross-roads. She had heard Doctor Wren declare that he would never go there alone or unarmed. But Ebenezer's

next remark relieved her anxiety in some measure.

"I done tole yo' uncle 'bout de bad lot libbin' round dat cross-roads, an' 'vised him to tek his gun 'long wif him. Scip's done gone 'wif him, too."

"Oh, I am so glad you warned Uncle, Ebenezer." Mary summoned up courage to lay her hand on his shoulder. "Come, let me help you into the phaeton. This hot sun will make you sick. Where is your hat?"

The darkey felt his grizzled head. "Doan' know'm, Miss May-ree, honey, doan' know'm. Reckon Ah los' him down yondah. Doan' mak no diffunce, nohow. Dis poah ole niggah ain't gwine need no hat no moah. O Lawd hab marcy on dis poah sinnah an' save him fum de poah white trash what's aftah him!"

"Ebenezer, what *is* the matter? There is no one after you. Father won't let anyone hurt you——"

"No'm, Miss May-ree, no'm, he wouldn't ef'n he wah home. But dem debbils knows he am away fo' de aftahnoon, an' yo' ma an' yo' uncle. Dey knows dey ain't nobuddy heahabouts 'ceptin' Mistah Clyde, an' he doan' cahe what folkses does to us niggahs."

But Mary knew that even Mr. Clyde was not on the premises. He had passed her and Bab on the road beyond the bridge. However, she did not mention this fact. "But what does anyone want you for anyway, Ebenezer?"

"Dey says Ah done killed a white man in de woods de oddah side ob de road yesti'day mawnin'; an' yo' knows whah I wah yesti'day mawnin', Miss May-ree! Yo' knows I wah back in ouah own woods wif yo' an' de li'l missies git-tin' wild flowahs."

"Of course I do, Ebenezer; and I shall tell everyone so."

"Tain't no good, Miss May-ree! Dey ain't gwine t' listen t' yo', honey. Dey's acomin' wif a rope to hang dis poah ole niggah by de neck twell he's daid!" A long wail broke from the old man. "Oh Lawd hab marcy on dis poah ole sin-nah, oh! oh! oh!"

The thought of the danger which Mary now understood was threatening Ebenezer almost paralyzed her. She looked wildly about for someone to help her, but the place seemed strangely deserted. She must do something to save the old darkey from these violent men. But what? "Get up, Ebenezer, get up! Be quick! They're not going to catch you! They're not, they're *not!* I won't let them. Get into the phaeton!"

Something in Mary's voice gave Ebenezer a faint hope that there might still be a means of escape. He scrambled to his feet and with her help climbed into the phaeton. The little girl, knowing that there was not a moment to lose, used the whip unsparingly on poor Daisy and drove headlong over the lawn toward the house. Her

one object was to get Ebenezer into it. Perhaps by bolting and barring doors and windows she might delay the mob until the police could arrive from the next town; for she knew that the sole guardian of the law in the little village would not be able to cope with a crowd of desperate ruffians. How thankful she was that the telephone had at last been installed!

"Pray, Ebenezer, pray that we shall have time to do everything before they come. Say the *Our Father—The Lord's Prayer*, you know." And while her companion mumbled away, Mary, gravely fearing that her plan would not be a success, urged the horse to greater speed while her frightened little heart sent up a cry to her whose intercession has never been sought in vain. "Mother, tell me, what am I to do?"

Like a flash the answer came just as they reached the front steps. Mary could have shouted with relief. Ebenezer was surprised at the joyful ring in her voice. "Oh, I know, I know, Ebenezer!"

"Yas'm, Miss May-ree, yas'm! Co'se yo' does, honey! An' Ah's gwine do persackly what yo' tells me, I suttinly is!"

Helping him up the steps and into the hall, she hurried him along to the stairs, which he mounted with more alacrity than she had expected, all the while giving her a garbled account of the events of the past half hour. He had set out to walk to the village for some paint which he needed to

decorate a little wagon he was making for the twins. Before he reached the main road, he had met Tobe, who breathlessly told him that a mob of "poah white trash," who had recently invaded the peaceful little village, was on its way to lynch him for the murder of the white man found dead in the woods. A knife which one Ely Norwood swore he had seen in Ebenezer's belt, had been found near the body.

Mary shuddered at the thought of having to meet these lawless fellows. She paused a moment at the window of the guest room opening on the attic stairs, from which she could see as far as the gates. To her relief, no one was yet in sight. Nevertheless, she bolted the door of the room as well as the one at the head of the stairs. Before opening the trapdoor, she paused again.

"Now, Ebenezer, you must promise that you will never, *never* tell where I am going to hide you."

"Nebah, Miss May-ree! Ah sweahs befoah Gawd dat Ah won't nebah tell!"

"Because, you see, someone else may have to hide in the same place some day. Everyone will ask you where you were——"

"Yas'm, Miss May-ree, yas'm, but Ah's gwine tell dem Ah wah hidin' in de woods——"

"No, no, that wouldn't be true. Tell them——"

"Ah's gwine tell dem Ah doan' persackly 'membah *whah* Ah wah, 'kase Ah doan', Miss

May-ree, Ah doan' fo' sho'. Ah nebah wah one ob de house niggahs, yo' knows. Ah wah alwuz moah fo' de hosses an' sech lak."

"You had better tell them they will have to ask Father."

"Dat's persackly what Ah's gwine do, Miss May-ree."

The little girl turned the screw in the hinge, and Ebenezer's eyes almost bulged from their sockets when he saw the floor before him opening up.

"Laws a massy! Won't all dem niggahs open dey eyes when Ah tells dem 'bout dis yeah!"

"*Ebenezer!*" There was a sob in Mary's voice. "What did you just promise?" Oh, had she made a dreadful mistake in disclosing the secret to him? But no, no! His life was in danger; and even if he afterward spread broadcast the secret so jealously guarded by the family for generations, she felt that the saving of the life of even this old darkey was well worth the price.

"Oh, am *dis* what Ah dussent tell nobuddy, Miss May-ree?"

"Yes, yes! Don't tell that I even brought you to the attic."

"Yas'm, Miss May-ree, yas'm. Ah sweahs Ah ain't gwine tell nobuddy nuffin at all."

"Now, catch hold of this rope, Ebenezer, and let yourself down; and when the trapdoor is closed, slip the bolts that you will find over your head at the right. Then go straight along toward the little

slits of light at the end of the room, and don't open the bolts for anything. Do you hear me, Ebenezer? Not for *anything!* When those awful men go away, I shall come back and click the catch this way, five times. Then you must open the bolts, and I shall help you out."

"De good Lawd lub yo', Miss May-ree, an' bress yo' an' perteck yo' an' yohn, an'——"

"Hurry, Ebenezer, hurry! I must run down to telephone for the police."

At last the trapdoor was securely fastened, and Mary ran to the window. Her heart sank at sight of the disorderly crowd just entering the gates. Down she flew to the telephone where she explained matters as best she could. "Come in an auto! Father will pay for it! Only come as fast as you can! Ever so many of you!"

Her throat was parched, and the pounding in her ears almost deafened her. She ran into the dining-room for a drink of water. What should she do next? where was everyone? why was the place so deserted? Oh, if Scip were only dozing in his accustomed place by the big chimney! Faithful old Scip who had outwitted the shrewd Yankees in the old days! But on second thought she was glad he was not there and that the house and grounds were deserted; for she feared that, when they could not find Ebenezer, the vengeance of the mob would fall on some other poor old darkey. Then she thought of Hercules, good old Hercules,

who would protect her from this rough crowd even as he had saved her from the ugly tramp on a former occasion. But Hercules was hundreds of miles away, and the mob was every moment drawing nearer. She must tell Aunt Mandy, who was dozing over her knitting while the twins slept. There might still be time for her to take them over to Doctor Wren's. But in her heart, Mary knew that the old nurse would refuse to leave her. However, she must try to persuade her to go. It would be too terrible to have her little sisters frightened by these bad men. She ran down the hall; but before she reached the staircase, the leaders of the mob were at the front door, which she had not taken time to close.

"Here, you kid! You're the very one we want!" Three of the crowd entered the hall and strode toward her. "Where's that old nigger you brought in here a while ago? No use saying you didn't. We've had men posted for an hour or more to watch, and they saw you drive up to the steps and hustle him into the house. So tell us where he is and be quick about it. We don't want to hurt you or do any damage to the place. All we're after is that nigger, Ebenezer, who killed Bill Jeffers in the woods yesterday."

Mary gulped hard. "What time yesterday?"

"Between ten and eleven o'clock in the morning."

Mary threw back her head with a triumphant

little laugh. "If you think Ebenezer did that, I can tell you that you are making a dreadful mistake; because he was with us children back in our own woods where we went for wild flowers at nine o'clock and stayed until twelve."

"That's a lie, and you know it!"

Mary shrank back, and the spokesman for the three advanced.

"Miss May-ree! Miss May-ree, honey! What's de mattah daown dah?" Aunt Mandy's quavering voice sounded at the head of the stairs.

"Don't come down, Aunt Mandy. Stay with the twins. It's just someone looking for Ebenezer."

"Why fo' dey lookin' fo' dat old niggah in de house, Miss May-ree? He nebah comes in heah."

"So you've got even the old mammy posted, have you? But it's no use, young lady. We're after that nigger, and we're going to get him. It's time to make an example of someone."

"Then find the real murderer!" Mary's voice rang out indignantly through the long hall. "I am speaking the truth when I tell you that Ebenezer was with us in our own woods back of the house all yesterday morning. If you had kept your eyes open, you would have seen us there yourself right down at the bank of the stream when you passed along on the other side." The start which the man could not wholly control was not lost on Mary. It gave her fresh courage. "I

know you, Ely Norwood! When Ebenezer saw you coming, he pulled us back behind some bushes and told us your name and said you were making trouble in the village. And I remember perfectly that I looked at my watch to see if it was time to eat the cookies we had taken with us, and it was *exactly ten o'clock!* So, you see, Ebenezer couldn't have been away down in the woods across the road from Doctor Wren's."

"Lies! lies! nothing but lies!" Norwood's face was distorted by an ugly sneer. "I thought you Catholics didn't believe in lying."

"We don't."

"Well, you're telling lies now faster than a horse can trot. Here, fellows, we're only wasting time. Search the house! He's in it all right enough, or our men would have seen him leave it. Come here, you kid! None of that!" For Mary had started upstairs to explain matters to Aunt Mandy.

"I am going to tell the nurse to wake my little sisters and take them some place out on the grounds before you frighten them to death."

"You're going to stay right down here until we are ready to go upstairs. See?"

Fearing to anger the man still more, Mary obeyed. She had not long to wait until the three were satisfied that Ebenezer was not on the first floor nor in the basement. At the head of the stairs they were met by Aunt Mandy.

"*Miss May-ree!* What would yo' pa an' ma say ef'n dey knowed yo' wuz tekin' strangehs fru de house disaway?"

"I am not *taking* them, Aunt Mandy. They are going in spite of me."

"Den yo' ain't gwine anuddah step wif dem! Come 'long in heah wif me! Yo' ain't got no call fo' t' be 'soshatin' wif sech poah white trash, nohow, what comes heah rampagin' fru de house ob de most 'spectable fambly in Figinny!"

"Get out of the way and shut up, old woman! We're not here to hurt any member of this highly respectable family. Tell us where that old nigger, Ebenezer, is, and we'll get out at once."

"Ain't Miss May-ree done tol' yo' dat he ain't in dis yeah house? ain't dat 'nuff fo' yo' alls?"

"No, she hasn't told us so, because she knows it's no use. She was seen bringing him in here less than a half hour ago."

"Den go 'long an' find him! No, *sah!* Yo' doan' git in heah whah ma li'l bressed lambs am sound asleep!" And thrusting Mary before her into the twins' room, she banged the door in Norwood's face and bolted it.

The three men were now sure that the object of their search was concealed in that room; and shaking and thumping the door, they threatened to break it in if it was not immediately opened. The twins, roused by the noise and frightened by the loud, rough voices, added their cries to the

confusion. Mary tried in vain to quiet them, assuring them that no one would hurt them; that it was Ebenezer they wanted. This only made matters worse; for Berta's scream, "They can't have my Ebeneasy, they can't have him, I say!" confirmed the men in their suspicion that he was in that very room.

"We shall have to let those men see that he is not in here, Aunt Mandy. Let us take the twinnies to my room and dress them while they are searching this one." Mary went to the door. "If you will stop your noise, I shall open the door. You must let us take my little sisters across the hall to another room. They are nearly frightened to death."

"Then be quick about it!"

The three stood aside while the little ones were hurried to Mary's room.

"Am dey sayin' trufe, Miss May-ree? has yo' done fotched dat ole niggah into de house?"

Mary nodded.

"But why fo' yo' do dat, honey chile?"

"I had to, Aunt Mandy. There was nothing else to do—no other safe place to hide him."

"But why fo' yo' has to hide him, ma bressed lamb? why fo' dem low down white trash want him, nohow, I lak to know?"

Mary hurriedly whispered the story, adding, "But they will never find him, Aunt Mandy, they will *never* find him!"

The old nurse's heart almost ceased to beat. If they did not find Ebenezer, to what extremes might they not resort in order to force Mary to reveal his hiding place? and what could she, a feeble old woman of a race hateful to that class of people, do to protect this frail child? Mary saw the anxiety written in every line of the faithful old face.

"Honey chile, honey chile, why fo' didn't yo' hide yo' own self 'long wif dat ole niggah so's dey cudn't find yo, neidah?"

"And leave you to face those awful men? But they're not going to hurt any of us, Aunt Mandy. When they can't find Ebenezer, they will go away. That's all." But even as she uttered the reassuring words, she wondered whether they were really so; and the old nurse, knowing that would not be all, put her trembling arms about the little girl and led her into the hall as the men declared their intention of searching her room.

"Yo' tek de babies an' kite 'long obah to Doctah Wren's, honey chile, quick as yo' kin!"

"Not without you, Aunt Mandy. Besides, he isn't home, and they would only follow us and maybe do some damage to his property."

The men saw them whispering together, and when two of them went up to the attic to continue their search, the third was left to keep an eye on the old nurse and the children. A glance through the open doors of the bedrooms showed the little

girl how thoroughly they had been searched. The contents of wardrobes and linen chests were strewn about the floor, and bed clothes, mattresses and pillows piled on top of them.

"Pray, Aunt Mandy, pray that the police will soon come. I telephoned for them, you know."

The nurse's troubled eyes lit up with hope, and she began planning how she might delay the crisis she so justly feared. She soon heard the two returning from their fruitless search of the attic. Their rage at being baffled found vent in such language as she had never before heard, and she tried to draw Mary and the little ones into a room and close the door. But Mary ran down the stairs, calling, "Come, Aunt Mandy, bring the twins down on the porch, and I shall tell the other men what I have already told these. Perhaps they will believe me. Anyway, they can't say the twins have made up anything."

"No, Miss May-ree, no, no! Doan' yo' be fo' gwine down dah wif dese li'l bressed lambs. Doan' yo', honey chile!" Aunt Mandy felt that whatever she might be able to do to prevent three men from harming her darling, she would be utterly powerless against the mob stamping about impatiently on the lawn in front of the house. But Mary was already half way down the stairs; and the nurse had no choice but to follow with Berta and Beth.

CHAPTER XXIII.

MARY FACES THE MOB

The crowd stood expectant as the little girl, closely followed by Aunt Mandy and the twins, appeared on the veranda; but when on their heels came the three men without their victim, a sullen murmur arose. It died away, however, as Mary began to speak. She repeated what she had told Norwood and his companions, adding, "And my little sisters will tell you the same thing."

"Yes, now that you have coached them to do it," sneered Norwood.

Mary's indignation overcame her fear. "'Twin-nies, have I said one word to you this afternoon about where we were or what we did yesterday morning?'"

Berta's candid gaze sought her sister's eyes. "No, Mary, not ever, ever at all."

"Not ever, ever at all, Mary," seconded Beth.

"Tell these men what we were doing in the woods."

"Oh, we had the most 'lightful time picking the beauty little wild flowers. Ebeneasy knows 'zactly where to find the prettiest ones. And we saw you walking along as fast as fast." Berta turned to Norwood with a winning smile. "But Ebeneasy wouldn't let us talk to you——" She shrank back against Mary, frightened by Norwood's ugly scowl.

"You infernal little liar! How dare you make up such a tale! I was at home all yesterday morning, as my wife can testify."

But Berta doggedly held her own. "Why—why it looked jes' 'zactly like you—your whiskers and your coat and that big hat, and you had a great, great big knife sticking out——"

"Hush, Berta, don't say any more, dear." Mary saw that Norwood's anger was fast getting the better of him. Again a murmur ran through the crowd on the lawn, but this time it seemed to her to have a different meaning. One of Norwood's companions spoke up. "Look here, Norwood, we came here to hang a worthless nigger that you swore killed Bill Jeffers; not to bully a harmless old woman and three helpless kids. I'll have no hand in it if that's your game."

"Nor I!" And the third man strode down off the porch after him.

Norwood saw that his influence was waning; and drawing a long knife from beneath his coat, he held it up before the group on the lawn.

"There 'tis, Mary, there——"

Mary covered Berta's mouth with her hand, and Norwood began to speak. "There's the knife that was found a few feet from Bill's dead body. I've seen that knife in this Ebenezer's possession. His initials are on the handle. Look at them—E. N. What more do you need to prove that he murdered Bill? This kid knows where the nigger is, and

she's got to tell us without any more fooling."

"But E. N. are *not* Ebenezer's initials."

"They're not, eh, young lady? you're going to try to bluff us on that point too, are you? Well, you can't do it. Everyone knows that E stands for Eben and N for Neezer."

In spite of the gravity of the situation, Mary threw back her head and laughed merrily. That a man of Norwood's age should not know any better than that, struck her as very amusing. "Why, you might as well say that my initials are M. R.—M for May, and R for Ree. Ebenezer is all one word just as Mary is. His name is Ebenezer Henry Clay Jackson, so his initials are E—H—C—J. Even if they were E. N., you couldn't prove that the knife belongs to him. Perhaps two or three men here have those initials, and you can't say they murdered that man." Her quick eye saw several in the crowd nudge their neighbors and look fixedly at Norwood. "Why, those are your very own initials, you know."

A louder murmur greeted this remark made in all innocence, and a look of fear leaped into Norwood's eyes. He saw the two who had helped him search the house withdraw a little distance from the group, and three or four others followed them.

"We'd better be moving, boys." The man who had already objected to Norwood's methods spoke. "Guess we've made a mistake. We'd better go home and get out our spellin' books so as not to be

fooled so easy next time. Too bad we didn't take time to remember that Norwood never was a per-tic'lar friend of Bill's."

Then Norwood's rage broke all bounds. Seizing Mary by the shoulder he roared: "Where's that fool nigger, you d——d kid! Tell me, or I'll use the rope we brought for him on you!"

With a cry, Mary shrank back, trying to push the twins behind her as Aunt Mandy sprang to the defense of her nurselings. But Berta jerked herself free and sprang like a little cat on Norwood, clinging to his coat and kicking his shins while she shrilled, "You let our Mary 'lone! You let our Mary 'lone! Daddy and Uncle will spank you with a big stick!" The smaller group on the lawn started for the porch, then fell back as an arm shot over Aunt Mandy's shoulder, and Norwood measured his length on the porch.

"Oh, we falled him down, Aunt Mandy! You and I——" but turning, Berta looked up into her uncle's face. Something she saw there made her run to the old nurse's protecting arms.

"Get off this porch, you hound, before I kick you off!" The words came low and tense; and the ashen pallor of the Doctor's face and the steely glint of his eyes urged Norwood to obey with alacrity. Facing about, the Doctor drew a revolver and aimed it at the crowd. With his eyes upon them, he asked sternly, "What are these children doing here, Aunt Mandy?"

"Massa Frank, Massa Frank——"

"It isn't Aunt Mandy's fault, Uncle! I made her bring them down. I thought perhaps these men would believe them when they wouldn't take my word——" A sob cut off Mary's explanation. Never before had she been doubted.

The men on the lawn saw the Doctor's face relax a little. "It is all right, Auntie. Take them indoors and give them their picture books—anything to make them forget all this. Mary, I shall need you here. What do these ruffians want?"

The story of the afternoon was soon told, the Doctor bending his head close to her lips to catch the last sentence spoken in a whisper: "The police are on the way."

"That fellow skulking back there behind the crowd, step up this way. Yes, I mean *you!* Be quick about it, or you may feel the additional weight of a few grains of lead. Now, my friend, the next time your charity prompts you to send me to visit a poor dying woman at the cross-roads, be careful to plan so that I shall not meet Doctor Wren on the way. You are all surprised to see me home so soon. According to your calculations, I should scarcely have arrived at the cross-roads. But as Doctor Wren had just passed through that locality and had made it his business to inquire into the health of the community there, which he assured me was never better, I concluded that I

was more urgently needed at home. However, I shall settle my little score with you later. As for the rest of you blood-thirsty scoundrels, it may afford you some satisfaction to know that I am fairly well acquainted with your leader. Yes, Ely Norwood, or whatever it is you call yourself now, I recognized you the instant I laid eyes on you. The last time I had the pleasure of meeting you, you were Alec Wells. The rest of you may like to know that the ruffian who has been leading you around by the nose was run out of his little home town in New York State, because he wasn't fit to live with respectable people. He has served at least two terms in jail. And now he comes down here disturbing the peace of a law-abiding community. You may well be proud of your leader, and, I might add, of yourselves for this afternoon's work. I am willing to bet that not one of you, even this cur who has sworn away the life of an innocent man, would know Ebenezer from any other old negro on the place. If Scip had followed me out on this porch, you would have sworn that he was your victim. And still you doubt the word of an innocent little child, judging her by your own contemptible selves. Let me tell you that the word of such a one is more to me and to any self-respecting man than the sworn testimony of a gang like you. You have not hesitated to take the law into your own hands by seeking to murder an innocent man to avenge the death of one prob-

ably very much like yourselves—far less respectable citizens than Ebenezer has proved himself. You have, therefore, made yourselves answerable to the law; and with all my heart I commend you to the care of the rightful guardians of that law, who are now waiting to look after you.” The Doctor waved his hand; and for the first time his hearers became aware of the presence of the police, who, leaving the auto at the bridge, had hurried up the hill and quietly surrounded them.

“But, Uncle, some of these men didn’t like the way their leader was acting, and they tried to get the others to go home——”

“Nevertheless, Mary, the fact remains that they have trespassed on the property of another with the avowed intention of taking human life. We shall let the law decide what is to be done about it; and your father may act as he sees fit in regard to the damage done his property. Sergeant, Alec Wells here, *alias* Ely Norwood, is deserving of your special attention. It is not at all improbable that a careful investigation as to his whereabouts yesterday morning may throw a great deal of light on the crime that was committed in the woods.”

In silence the Doctor and Mary stood watching until the last of the crowd had disappeared. Then dropping his revolver into his coat pocket, he held out his arms to the child.

“O Uncle, it was all so awful, so *awful!*” She

hid her face against his coat and trembled violently.

"There, there, pet; it is all over, and no very serious damage done."

Mary threw back her head. "But I wouldn't have told, Uncle! I wouldn't have told if they had hanged me with that dreadful rope they brought for poor old Ebenezer!"

"No, little one, you would not have told; and I thank God that I arrived in time to prevent anything more than you had already suffered from those beasts! I am sure that I never rode so fast in all my life, though I did not for a moment suspect the true state of affairs. Something urged me to take the bridle path through the fields, which seemed strangely deserted; but when I reached the barn and found no one there, either, I was thoroughly frightened and hurried into the house by the back door."

"Tobe must have told everyone what was going to happen, and I suppose they were so frightened that they all ran away and hid. Even the dogs are gone."

"But where is Clyde? I told him that I was called to the cross-roads, and he assured me that he would be around all afternoon."

"Bab and I passed him the other side of the bridge. He was riding fast, and I remember thinking at the time that he didn't look pleased to meet us."

"The scoundrel! Shook all responsibility, did he? Well, he was hired by me two years ago, and he will be fired by me for this day's work. Running off and leaving a helpless old woman and you children to face that mob!"

"O Uncle, you looked so terrible, and I was so afraid you were going to shoot!"

The Doctor laughed. "I could not have done that even if it had become necessary, for the revolver is absolutely empty. I cleaned it this morning and was interrupted before I had time to reload it—a fact which escaped my mind when I slipped it into my pocket after Ebenezer and Scip had told me the kind of locality I was about to visit. But tell me, Goldilocks, where have you managed to conceal the old darkey so successfully?"

"Can't you guess, Uncle? I forgot all about it myself until I asked Blessed Mother to help me. Then in a flash it came to me. But I must run up and let him out. He will be nearly smothered."

"I shall go with you. The poor old fellow will need more help to climb out of that place than you are able to give him."

"And, Uncle, *please* try to make him understand that he mustn't tell where he has been hiding. I tried to, but I am afraid he will forget to keep the secret."

After clicking the catch five times, they waited a few moments; but to Mary's surprise the trap-

door did not open. Again and again she twisted the screw; but it was evident that Ebenezer did not hear the signal. The Doctor stamped near the chimney, though Mary explained that the thickness of the floor would prevent the sound from being heard below.

"He must be asleep, Uncle."

The Doctor felt that something more serious was the trouble, but he did not show his anxiety to Mary. "He really should not be left in that close place any longer. I shall go down to the panel at the foot of the stairs and climb up through the passage in the chimney. It would be well if you would get some ice water."

Before entering the passage, he went to the medicine cabinet and slipped two bottles into his pocket.

Mary, hurrying through the lower hall with the ice water, saw the carriage stop at the front steps and paused long enough to explain to her father and mother the meaning of the trampled lawn and disorderly house. They hastened upstairs with her, and in the hall met the Doctor looking like a chimney sweep.

"I am glad you are home: I need your help, Rob. The fright and hurry have evidently been too much for the poor old fellow. He is lying against the chimney so that I cannot push in the little door. The ledge is so narrow that I find it impossible to throw my whole weight against it.

It gives, but will not open sufficiently for me to put even my hand in. It is well that neither of us is very stout, for we shall have a tight squeeze as it is. Mary, put your pitcher on the floor near the trap where I can reach it, and then come down here with Mother. It will not do to have anyone surprising us while we are helping Ebenezer out of the hiding hole. If you wait in the guest room here, we shall call you if you are needed.” Fearing the worst for the old darkey, the Doctor was determined that the little girl should be spared any further shock for that day at least.

It was a difficult matter for both men to obtain a footing outside the little door; and it took all their combined strength to force it in, pushing Ebenezer with it. Mr. Selwyn hurried to unbolt the trapdoor, and they finally succeeded in lifting the old negro out into the attic.

“Alive, thank God, but not much more, Rob! It would have been a blow to Mary if he had died down there after all she has gone through to save him.”

“Well for us that it isn’t Pompey. We could never have pushed open the door with him leaning against it. Ebenezer is only skin and bones. No one knows how old he is.”

The Doctor forced some brandy between the old man’s lips, and the two men worked with him for some time before he showed signs of returning consciousness. They carried an old couch in from

the next room and made him as comfortable as possible. At last he opened his eyes and stared wildly about him. His quavering voice rang out pitifully.

“Is Ah daid? did dey hang me by de neck twell Ah’s daid?”

“No, no, Ebenezer, you are perfectly safe now. Those ruffians have been taken away by the police.”

“T’ank de good Lawd, Massa Rob! T’ank de good Lawd an’ Miss May-ree! Ah’s done libbed t’ die in ma bed—lak de ’spectable niggah—what Ah’s alwuz—tried t’ be——” The haggard, drawn look on the wrinkled face gave place to one of utter peace and contentment, and Ebenezer slept. Some time later he woke and asked for Mary. Before going to him the little girl reminded her uncle of the necessity of impressing on him the importance of keeping the secret.

“Don’t let that worry you, dear. I can assure you that the secret will be perfectly safe with Ebenezer.”

Mary sat holding the gnarled, old black hand. Once she caught the words, “T’ank de good Lawd an’ Miss May-ree Ah’s gwine die in ma bed lak a ’spectable niggah!”

“But you’re not going to die now, Ebenezer. You will be all right to-morrow, I’m sure; and then you are going to take us to see the cave where the bear lived. Don’t you remember?”

"Jes' as yo' says, Miss May-ree, jes' as yo' says. Ah's gwine do persackly what yo' says, 'kase yo' alwuz tells true. Yo' done tole dis yeah niggah dem debbils wouldn't catch him nohow, an' dey nebah done it. An'—an'—but Massa Rob an' Massa Alf'ed an' Missy Bertha ain't gwine know 'bout dat b'ah cave, 'kase ole Marse Selwyn done 'pressed it on me fo' sho' dat Ah wahn't to tell dem nuffin' 'bout it, nohow. Missy Bertha am sho'ly a sweet, perky li'l missy, she sho'ly am—bress her li'l heart!" And Mary knew that the old man was wandering in the long ago. Presently he dozed again, and Mary was sent down to bed. Mr. Selwyn and the Doctor remained with Ebenezer.

Toward morning they saw that the end was very near; and in the early gray dawn the faithful old darkey died in his bed "lak de 'spectable niggah" he had always tried to be.

CHAPTER XXIV.

GOOD-BYE TO CEDAR RIDGE.

"I am afraid that my little girl's love for her daddy's old home has been very much lessened by the trying events of last week." Mr. Selwyn stroked the bright head leaning against his knee. He and Mary had just returned from their last stroll down to the gates; for on the following morning they were to start for New York. The two had seated themselves on the veranda, he in a big armchair, she on the step at his feet, to watch the moon rise over the tall, dark cedars at the end of the ridge.

"But why do you think that, Father? Those rough, bad men don't belong to Cedar Ridge. They don't belong even to the village. Most of them have come here only lately. The real village people have always been lovely to us whenever we have driven in there. Even poor old Ebenezer's death didn't make me feel so very bad. I was so thankful that he died as he did instead of in the way those terrible men wanted to make him die. He couldn't have lived very much longer anyway. I really think it is better he is gone: I would always be afraid that some of those bad men might do something to him to get even because they were put in jail and fined. Of course, Norwood could never hurt him again. That poor, wicked man! I hope he will be sorry before they

hang him. But I am going to do exactly as Uncle said—pretend it was all an ugly dream and forget about it as fast as I can. No, indeed, Father, I can't think of a single thing that would lessen my love for Cedar Ridge. I love it better and better every day; and if Uncle and Aunt Mary could be here, I would never wish to leave it."

"Not even to return to Bird-a-Lea?"

"No, Father. Before we came down here, I was sure I could never think so much of any place as I did of Bird-a-Lea. It is so beautiful, and we were so happy there. But it hasn't the meaning for us that your old home has; and I wish we could stay here all the year round."

"So do I, pet. If it were not for Uncle Frank and Aunt Mary, I would soon give up my business in New York and come down here to look after the old place in person. Perhaps we shall be able to arrange it some day. Aunt Mary may be sent to some other house of the Order, though I should be sorry to see her leave Maryvale; and Uncle could find enough to keep him busy and happy down here. Doctor Wren has practically retired."

"Poor Bab! I did feel so sorry for her when the Doctor brought her over here that evening to apologize for running away and leaving me alone with Ebenezer. But even that was the very best thing she could have done, though at the time I thought she was terrible. You see, Father, if she had stayed with me, she would have insisted on

coming to the attic, too. She would never have been willing to wait downstairs alone. Then she would have seen our hiding place. But now it is still our own secret. And she is so happy, Father, about coming to Maryvale in the fall. I shall ask Aunt Mary to let her come over to stay all night as Wilhelmina does. I hope Wilhelmina will like her as much as I do. Oh, if we could only find some trace of her mother! Not a single answer to that notice you put in the papers, was there, Father?"

"No, Mary; and it was worded in such a way that there could be no possibility of its being understood by anyone but Mrs. Wren. She was to apply to my lawyer for the information promised her; but he has had no request for it either in person or by mail. So I fear that Mrs. Wren is dead, dear. Still, we shall not give up yet."

"And to think that our home for the little sick children is almost ready to be opened, Father! Dear, me! I wish it wasn't so hard to decide on a name for it."

"Let us wait and ask Aunt Mary's advice about that. By the way, did she mention Florence in her letter? I was called away before you had finished reading it."

"Yes, Father, she said that Florence is finding these warm days very trying. But everyone minds the first warm days more than the real summer, I think. When we are back again at Bird-a-Lea, I

am going to drive her to the woods every day. She will like that. O Father! *isn't it wonderful now!*" Mary's eyes drank in the beauty of the scene. The full moon had risen above the dark treetops, flooding everything in its mellow radiance. "This is one of the ways I shall love to remember Cedar Ridge. Another is the way it looked that first evening with the glorious sunset behind it; and another, as it has been since the shrubs and fruit trees began to blossom. At Bird-a-Lea I thought I loved the autumn best; but now spring seems more beautiful to me."

"You belong to the spring, little bluebird. Leave the summer, autumn, and winter to us old people."

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